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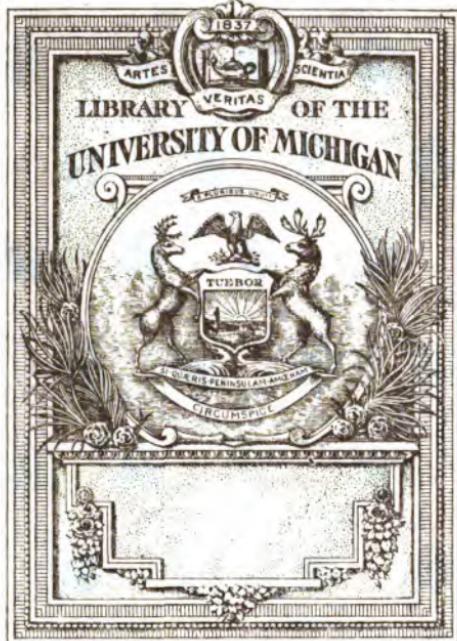
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THE SIEGE
of
LADY RESOLUTE

A Novel

by
HARRIS DICKSON



New York and London
Harper & Brothers Publishers

1902

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Published February, 1902.

01/4/2024 11:49 AM

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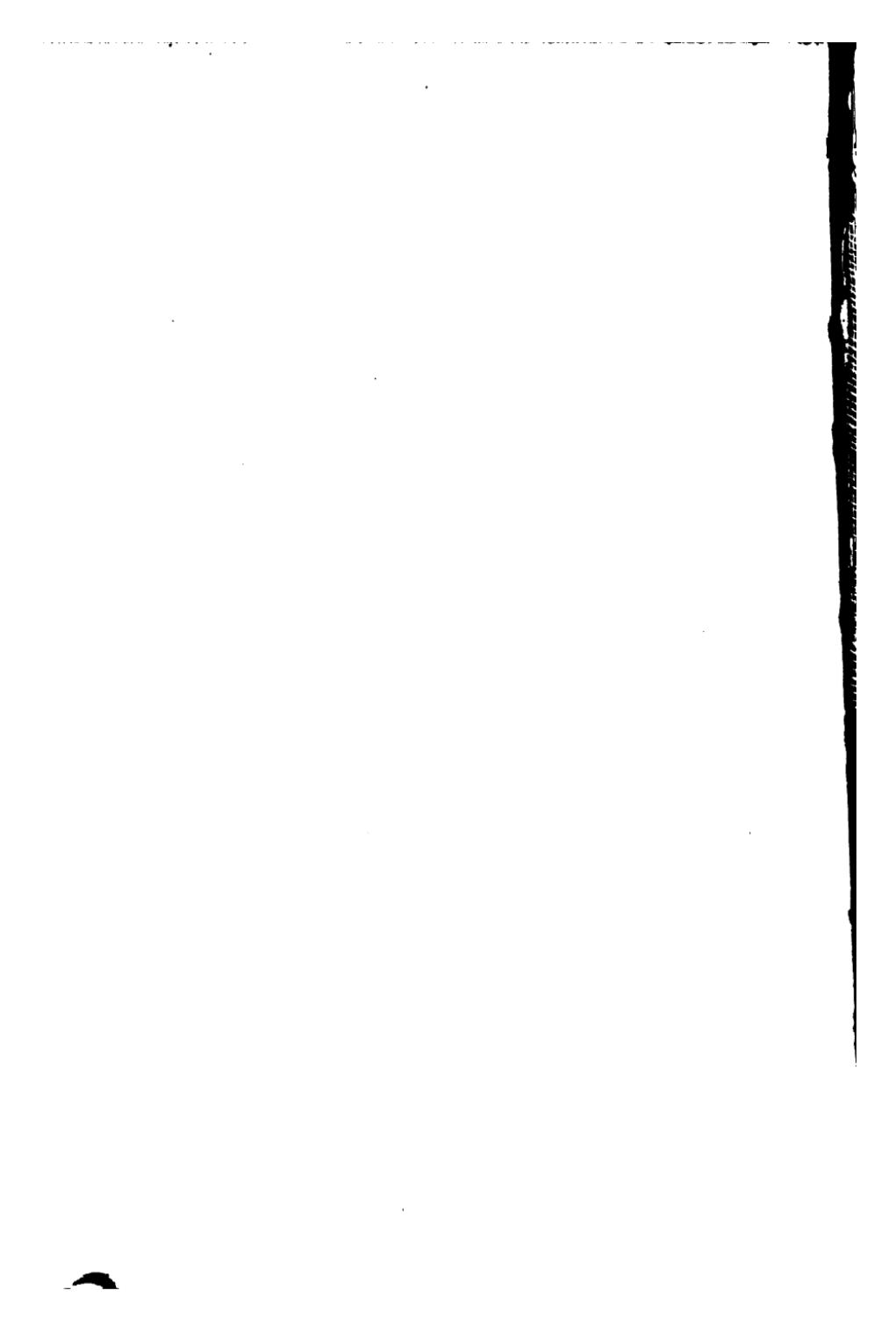
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THE
SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE



I

SAINT-MAURICE OF CHÂTEAUNOIR

*Chance oft divides with heedless hand
The foolish from the wise,
And scarce a slender hair between
The hero and the coward lies.*

THE opening years of the eighteenth century shuddered at the ferocity of a religious war then being waged in the far south of France.

In that secluded region there dwelt a simple and hardy race, generous as their vineyards, sunny tempered as their skies, yet strong and brave withal as their own impenetrable mountains.

Under their dashing leaders, Cavalier and Roland, they had again and again repulsed the Royal troops; but courage and devotion could not forever withstand the might of numbers and the skill of men bred to the business of battle.

And now the desolated Cévennes were being ravaged in the name of the Man of Peace.

The armies of his most Christian Majesty Louis XIV. enforced their King's benignant creed. With sword and torch they scarred his blood-red rubrics across

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a blackened land. Cavalier had been routed, and the rebellion was at an end.

Against the base of Mont Pilat there clung the château of Rougemont. Turreted and towered, it grew where centuries had bound it to the mountain-side, with rambling wings and fantastic gables, with echoing corridors and alluring casements—and the ivy waving over all.

Without were grass-grown walks and neglected rose-gardens; a long-forgotten dial faithfully marked the hours in a tangle of brush where no human eyes ever came to see.

It was a prim old château, this Rougemont, built of red brick faced with cold gray stone, dignified and sedate, the home of drowsy peace.

Like a simple country gentleman it looked serenely out upon its grove of stunted oaks, grown gnarled through battling with the storms. And like a simple country gentleman it shrank back again, aghast to find itself the headquarters of invading soldiery, the centre of turmoil and tumult, and of death.

This monument of ancient peace had become a rendezvous of war. Here was stationed a regiment of troops under command of d'Hercourt, "The Torch of the Cévennes." D'Hercourt—the cynical, sensuous, courteous d'Hercourt—smiling, merciless, unscrupulous, he had left his deathless mark upon the country.

The circling drive-way leading to the portico was now cut and gashed by cannon-wheels; huge black splotches on the lawn marked where camp-fires smouldered and destroyed the green. Here and there against the trees lay piles of sordid plunder, the wretched pillage of the poor.

Colonel d'Hercourt and a group of his officers lounged lazily on the portico, and watched with sardonic amuse-

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ment the wrangling soldiers snarl like dogs over the plunder they had won.

“Wonder how they will relish being recalled?” spoke d’Hercourt, thoughtfully. “This marauding business suits their fancy better than hot fighting at the front. But as for me, I am sick of it.” He stretched himself more comfortably in his chair. “Give me the Rue St. Jacques, a smoking dinner at ‘La Corne d’Abondance,’ some good high play at Bianchi’s—light laughter and flashing eyes mingled with it all—”

“Amen to that,” responded Brantôme.

“Why not wish for Eden at once, and be done with your wishing?” sneered a thin-faced lieutenant who had seen service in the American colonies under the famous young Bienville. “I had just as lief be back again in Louisiana, fighting savages and mosquitoes and heat, as be penned up forever in this accursed hole. For there, at least, a bold hand can gain great riches and glory.” The thin-faced lieutenant was in an ugly humor and scowled at all the world.

Generally when he prated too loudly of Louisiana the men silenced him by inquiring why he had left such a fabulous land. They well knew it to be a story which would not bear the telling.

So Brantôme paid him no attention; he only continued his conversation with d’Hercourt.

“You have made a most thorough job of this campaign,” he said, “for a man who is not fond of marauding. To-day’s catch will not leave an armed squad between here and Lyons, nor a roof which will turn the rain.”

“Yes, it is fairly complete,” assented d’Hercourt. “This is about the last lot—the beasts, when they are whipped, why will they not quit, as gentlemen do? Ugh, I grow weary of having them shot.”

D’Hercourt’s distaste for this work was not due to

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squeamishness or mercy, but because it kept him for so long away from Paris. Small matter to him that he left the Cévenol valleys to shiver at his unparalleled rapacity for blood and treasure.

"Well, the soldier must do his duty," d'Hercourt continued, putting up the usual shield for every crime.

"And the strong arm gathers in the spoils," complacently remarked Brantôme.

"What use could even the devil make of spoils down here," cut in another of the group, "a hundred leagues away from the gaming-tables, and the women—unless," he quickly added, sneeringly—"unless the devil were lucky as Saint-Maurice there, to enjoy the only pretty smile in the valley."

The speaker looked towards the great door standing open behind them, and called attention to young César de Saint-Maurice, who came briskly towards his comrades, whistling a gay little air. Saint-Maurice stopped short at the threshold and nodded smilingly to the man who jeered at him. The lad—for he seemed little more—was dressed with exceeding care, in the height of military fashion; his face beamed with some expected pleasure just ahead.

A tall and sturdy lad was Saint-Maurice, with a face fresh as a mountain girl's, yet noble, high strung, and wholly manly. He had dark and honest eyes, which looked straight at you, a profusion of waving black hair, through which ran a peculiar streak of white from his left temple, giving him a curiously distinguished air.

A patrician to his finger-tips he was, and by the best of rights, for the lad bore the ancient title "Count of Châteaunoir." And, besides, he was son and heir to that famous noble, Hector, Duke of Vernais, of valiant Norman stock.

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His two-and-twenty years had been sufficient to win him some distinction in the army as a gay, good fighter, and even wider fame in Paris for a gallant carpet-knight and a dangerous rival.

He lived lightly now, but when his own time came he would succeed to one of the noblest duchies in all the land of France. Until then men simply called him Saint-Maurice, or the Count of Châteaunoir.

The heart warmed to this lad, with his winning boyishness of manner and the laughingly defiant expression at his lips.

Such was the young soldier who, subordinate to d'Hercourt, held a commission in the King's troops, which had just finished crushing this peasant insurrection. But the work of shooting the helpless and plundering their homes was not to his taste. When he first joined the army he had been so much taunted by more hardened soldiers for his leaning towards the side of mercy that Saint-Maurice, who feared nothing under Heaven as he did the ridicule of his fashionable world, had apparently become even more callous to suffering than they. But his heart often sickened at the dripping of his blade, and many were the deeds of gentleness he had done, despite his orders.

The sudden appearance of Saint-Maurice in the door-way, and the jeer flung at him, was the signal for all his comrades to turn their eyes upon him. All noted at once the nicety with which he was dressed and the beaming smile he could not conceal.

"Hey, Saint-Maurice, where now? The sunset tryst again?" d'Hercourt inquired, with that irritating superiority which is so subtle and so maddening. The boy flushed as if he were accused of a crime, but answered, bravely:

"No, I ride for exercise."

"As if six long leagues this morning were not

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enough," Brantôme laughed, disbelievingly, and Saint-Maurice looked confused.

"That fine uniform, my dear Saint-Maurice," persisted d'Hercourt, "that hair so carefully arranged—yes, the white flake shows dazzlingly—ah, captain, captain, your garb smacks of the bower, not the bivouac."

The younger officer could afford to be good-natured; the world was very bright and beautiful to him now. Though a broad flush overspread his face at the rude banter of his comrades, he passed jauntily down the steps, flinching but little outwardly from their stinging volley, and flung himself astride his horse, already in full gallop before he reached the saddle.

"Egad! the young devil rides well," commented d'Hercourt, looking after him.

"And fights well, too," suggested one of the others; "but Saint-Maurice has other thoughts in his head this afternoon."

From war to love Saint-Maurice rode, leaving behind the sordid soldiers and the memories of bloody strife. With infinite satisfaction he rejoiced that this butcher's work was so nearly done, and that all of love and life lay fair before him. Yet there was a reason why he dreaded the coming of orders which would summon him to other fields.

It was this very reason which now drew him on, pounding madly along the road as if the taunts of his companions were whipping him on his way.

While he yet remained in hearing, he maintained his rattling gait, his horse drumming a loud tattoo upon the hard, stone road. Saint-Maurice wore his annoyance very badly—for jeers and jibes to him were deadlier than sword or cannon. He wondered why he should suddenly have become so sensitive—other affairs of his had been made the subject of banter

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before this one, and it did not irritate him. Perhaps he failed to reason it out, that on previous occasions, somewhat similar, there was no tenderness which galled him at the scoffer's lashing tongue.

Some little distance beyond the eye and ear of gossip he reined his horse, turned abruptly from the road, and took an obscure, winding way through the woods, bending his head to dodge the branches.

His thoughts now sped far in advance of his horse, and his expression changed from the displeasure of what he had left behind to the sweetness of what was waiting. He became a pleasanter lad to look upon.

On and up he rode, slowly now, for the brush grew thick—over fallen trees and swift-running mountain streams. The road was toilsome, but the toil was sweet. He came out at last, breathless, into a little glade directly behind the old red château, and almost overtopping it. Here he stopped to look about, first expectantly, then—as he could see no one—with intense disappointment.

His gray horse stopped beside a tree made familiar by many visits, and waited for his master to dismount.

Saint-Maurice searched the place hastily, then pushed through the undergrowth and peered out over a tiny foot-path which here and there showed itself against the thick-grown cliff. Not the rattle of a pebble could he hear, not a fluttering ribbon was in sight.

Feeling himself a much-injured man, he strode to and fro until he settled down upon a rude bench wedged in between two rough oak-trees.

While he vented his temper by kicking viciously at everything within reach, a dark curly head peered above the rock behind him. A girl's lithe, noiseless figure crept up softly, suppressing her laughter, until, with a low ripple, she held both hands close about his eyes and called merrily:

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“Guess, guess, César—guess! who is it? What a foolish boy you are, to sit and grumble and swear!”

And then she twisted his head about—not a difficult task—and kissed him full upon the lips.

“Yes, Julie, you were not here, and I was disappointed—”

“But where’s that perfect confidence you boast so of?”

“Oh, well, dear heart, I am troubled and worried this afternoon.”

The banter and lightness of her manner instantly changed, and something deep in her mysterious eyes hinted of a woman, yet unawakened, whose soul was strong and brave and resolute—capable of facing sorrow or danger without a tremor.

“What troubles you, César?” she asked, drawing closer to him; she loved him more tenderly when he was in trouble.

“Oh, nothing; only I’m afraid we can meet here no longer.”

“Why?” she asked, in genuine alarm.

“D’Hercourt and the other men suspect it, and they might be speaking evil of you.”

“Evil of *me*? What is wrong?” She looked at him with serious, unbelieving eyes.

“Nothing wrong, Conchita, little Conchita,” a dear love name he called her by; “nothing wrong, only—” he stammered.

“Only what? Are *you* in danger?—you have not been ordered away?” These were her two greatest dreads.

“No,” and he laughed aloud at her solicitude. “I only worried lest they find it out.”

“Is it not right,” she questioned, “if I love you?” The man looked at her half smiling, half glorying in the trustful innocence of the girl.

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"But they suspect that I love you—suspect our secret meetings," he tried to explain.

"What if they do? Why should I care? I have no shame for that."

"But, dear, you do not understand."

"Yes, I do. Each of them, perhaps, loves some one, too, and they will understand."

He shook his head. "Nay, nay, such is not their way to love—as you and I, Conchita."

She looked up wonderingly into his eyes, puzzled for a moment, and then:

"How can they love otherwise?" she asked, very slowly. No answer coming, she laid her head restfully upon his shoulder and thought no more of it.

"But wherefore should *we* care what *their* loves may be to them?" the girl continued. "Ours is sufficient unto us."

He stroked her hair; in silence they gazed out upon the roof-tops of Rougemont.

Saint-Maurice awkwardly returned to the unpleasant subject, for d'Hercourt's raillery was yet stinging his ears.

"Julie, we must have a little more caution when the others are near."

"Why?"

"They—they are so unbelieving; they sneer and jeer."

"What boots it, César? I am proud of you, proud of my love." She maintained her position with impregnable innocence.

The man kept silence, half ashamed. Then he asked her:

"Does your mother suspect?"

"No, but I mean to tell her."

"You must not. She would storm at you for loving an officer of the King, stanch Protestant that she is."

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"I am afraid she will; but she *must* know it some day. Besides, I do not fear her." And the little girl stood erect before him, brown, slender, sixteen, unfearing. "We are of one blood, she and I. I love her, obey her in all save this; but for this one time I do as *I* choose."

Saint-Maurice gazed proudly upon the defiant figure of the child, and wondered dimly why his own heart held her so sacredly, a woman apart from all the others he had known—and lightly loved.

But he had determined to caution her, so he said:

"You must understand, too, Conchita, that I do not desire this gossip to reach my father until I can see him. He has some ideas of his own about my marriage. And for me to marry a Huguenot at this time would ruin me in the army." He kept his face averted, as if ashamed to suggest expediency or worldly barriers which the girl so little understood.

Though Julie de Severac was the heiress to a noble name and considerable estates, she had never been thrown into the fierce glare of social life. She lived alone with her mother at Rougemont, glorying in the good fight put forward by their men. Then the soldiers came, and with them Saint-Maurice. The King's officers took the best apartments in their château, while Julie, her mother, and the servants banished themselves to an old, unused wing. Such a girl as she could not be forever kept in-doors, and Saint-Maurice had met her in this very glade where they were then sitting together. It was the beginning of the end for both.

Now he sat and held the girl close to him, and in those silences which forever come between lovers, he strove vainly to talk with her of things he thought that she should know.

He realized that this girl comprehended nothing

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of worldly matters, and could never understand the moral cowardice which possessed him in face of his comrades or his father. Vice was fashionable, and men of fashion sneered at the bare mention of honorable love.

Many times Saint-Maurice had planned to caution Julie that she must be discreet, for other people might look upon their meetings with eyes very different from their own. Often and often the boy had meant to talk plainly on these subjects with her, but each time he began, and the girl fixed her clear, deep eyes upon him, he had—only kissed her and waited until another day.

And even now he turned his face away when he suggested that there might possibly be some present objection to their marriage. After a period of silence Julie spoke:

“César,” she asked—the thought had been slow in coming to her—“do you mean that loving me will harm you?” The girl drew herself away—the idea was new.

“No, no, Conchita, not that. But I must look ahead for both of us, you know so little of the world—that—”

There was a tone almost of reproach in her voice as she said:

“I never dreamed it. I loved you, that is all—I thought of nothing else. You are fighting my people; I try not to remember that; it is your duty. My mother hates you; I will brave her anger. I struggled against this love, but when I *did* come to you, there was no reservation. To me you are kin and king and country—all.”

The man trembled at the intensity of her quiet tones, his breast heaving with a new pride and a new responsibility.

“Yes, Julie, and before your own pure heart I say, I know all that. Yet must we bide our time. My

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own father must be first won over, else you have a beggar for a husband."

And after the time-worn, world-old fashion of lovers, the argument was settled. Her head rested again on his breast. She laughed with a woman's faith at what she could not comprehend.

There came the sharp snapping of a twig, and Julie looked up hastily to see two men advancing towards the glade. Quick as a wild forest creature, she tore herself from Saint-Maurice and disappeared down the side of the cliff just as the men entered the clearing. Her lover rose and stood crimson with confusion beside the bench where they had been sitting together.

"What a charming *bonne fortune*," laughed d'Hercourt. Saint-Maurice's face flamed at the word, so often heard in their revels, but which now bore such a blasphemous meaning. "We must apologize for spoiling sport, but we never supposed we would find you here."

"Yes," explained Brantôme, "you see, the Colonel wanted some fresh air, and we merely strolled up here. Did you come for the air?" And the two men burst out in a malicious peal of laughter at the muddled awkwardness of the boy.

Then they plied him with maddening questions, coming so quickly one after the other he could not answer.

'Tis often but a copper's toss between a coward and a hero. Saint-Maurice, dazed, irritated, in the very shyness of his love, took the first false step, and denied it. Like many another man before him, he had rather be thought a villain than a fool. He dreaded the ridiculous variations of the story which would be told at mess, and so assumed a swaggering air of bravado.

"Pity a fellow cannot amuse himself," he grumbled, "without having two great lumbering meddlers—"

"Amuse himself," interrupted d'Hercourt. "It look-

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ed like a more serious piece of business to me. Marry her, Saint-Maurice; we'll have our sweethearts buy potatoes of you in Paris."

"She must have been active from the way she went crashing through the brushes," laughed Brantôme.

For a while Saint-Maurice parried their taunts as best he could; then, thoroughly routed, he beat an inglorious retreat, clattering away down the mountain-side with reckless disregard of his neck.

"A shrewd guess, d'Hercourt," chuckled Brantôme after Saint-Maurice had fled. "I've watched him coming up this way many evenings. I thought this must be about the place."

"It must have been the daughter of the château," observed d'Hercourt. "I've noticed a dark little girl slipping around back there in the wing."

"And the boy is just fool enough to marry her. We'll have rare sport with him over this adventure."

Together they slowly picked their way back to quarters, where Saint-Maurice did not appear until it was the hour for him to go on duty. And then he came in such a fractious humor that they feared to badger him.

Strive as he might, the high-spirited fellow became more and more disgusted with himself for not resenting the banter of d'Hercourt. This man had long been looked up to by the younger one as a pattern of all the elegant vices and fashionable sins which formed so large a part of the world about him. That world shrugged its incredulous shoulders at any suggestion of nobility in men or purity in women; and Saint-Maurice was not yet strong enough to rise superior to its sinister influence. He could face the swords, but not the tongues, of the brilliant libertines by whom he was surrounded.

During the few days which followed, Saint-Maurice

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avoided Julie. Supersensitive as he was, smarting under the continual taunts of those coarse natures which delighted in low jests, he upbraided himself that he should lack the courage to silence them once for all. Yet he did lack this moral stamina; he knew it, and he hated himself for the cowardice.

As for Julie, she watched, and wondered what cloud of evil overhung Saint-Maurice. He had hinted at something of a trouble. She observed him from a distance, and, with the intuition of love, she knew the boy's unhappiness. More than ever, she longed for him to come, to lay his head upon her breast, and let her share that trouble with him. Her brave, resolute little heart ached to tell him she was strong, she would delight to bear his burdens. The vague words he had spoken on the hill-side had opened a new field of thought—perhaps she was standing in his way; perhaps she would be a clog upon his ambition in the great world of which she knew so little. Perhaps—oh! how ardently she wished he would not keep so closely with those men, so she could talk to him without reserve of these new fears which now beset her.

And Saint-Maurice, cursing himself for a weak, unmanly coward, caught occasional glimpses of Julie flitting about the grounds, yet he dared not go to stand beside her like a man.

On the fourth day after César's interrupted meeting with Julie, two prisoners were brought in—white-bloused Camisards—humble, aged peasants. It was inconvenient to guard them; the higher authorities cared little what was done in the way of extermination, and so as a mere matter of expediency d'Hercourt looked up from his glass long enough to order them shot.

“They are probably spies, anyhow,” he declared. This news brought Julie from the seclusion of the

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west wing, where she and her mother lodged, for the condemned men were her old servants of the château. She came boldly into the room where d'Hercourt, Saint-Maurice, and the others were gathered.

The girl entered composedly, and with such dignity as a young damsel may command in the presence of soldiers. D'Hercourt and Brantôme were expecting her, and had planned a scene for the embarrassment of Saint-Maurice.

When Julie reluctantly approached d'Hercourt, her cheeks flushed, for there was that in his glance which brought the maiden color from its hiding.

She was bidden: "Speak to my lord Saint-Maurice there; you will find him gentler, tenderer hearted than we; the matter is entirely in his hands." Then, as she turned towards her lover, the whole ring of smiling devils bent their malicious eyes upon him to see what he would do.

Young Saint-Maurice, taken completely by surprise, had no time to muster his resolution.

Julie could not restrain a swift expression of relief that she had only to beg of César, for César would not refuse her. She had forgotten the temporary shadow between them.

"Oh, C—" but she checked herself as the ready laugh went round. The color came again to her cheeks.

"My lord," she corrected herself, "I only ask the lives of Clément and Paul, the two old men—"

Saint-Maurice was watching the others laughing at him over Julie's shoulders. He shifted uneasily in his chair, fighting down his first desire to take her in his arms and grant her anything she chose. But the men were laughing at him, and he could not stand their derision.

D'Hercourt twisted at his mustache, pointing to

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her boots and laughing with Brantôme, for truly Julie's boots were not in the mode.

"Only the two old men—" Julie repeated.

"Spies," suggested d'Hercourt, solemnly, giving Saint-Maurice his cue.

"But," Saint-Maurice echoed the Colonel's words, his coward tongue refusing the comfort his heart would have it give. "But they are spies—"

Julie shrank back a step, cut more deeply by his unsympathetic tone than by his words.

Then she saw his eyes glancing past her to the group of men at her back. She turned, and caught the sarcastic amusement upon all their faces, and dimly understood now she was being made their sport; the girl looked confidently to Saint-Maurice for the protection it was her right to expect.

"My lord Saint-Maurice is a soldier"—d'Hercourt curled his cynical lip as he spoke—"but can doubtless be moved by a pleading beauty."

"It is no matter of a pleading beauty, my lord," returned Julie, with quiet dignity. "I ask simply for justice. These men are not spies."

"They were taken in arms against the King," Saint-Maurice ventured.

"Who can blame them? You hunt them like beasts, you murder them in their houses. They *must* fight." Julie answered, promptly, and the blood of her fighting forefathers burned in her cheek.

"Mademoiselle is eloquent," d'Hercourt interposed. "But plead with Lord Saint-Maurice there. Perhaps you can move him from his duty—*he is young*."

This thrust and sneer braced Saint-Maurice's faltering resolution.

"It is impossible, mademoiselle," he replied, speaking quickly and positively, lest he give way to his own

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desire. "They have been condemned as spies, and must be shot."

Julie flinched back again, wavered towards him a moment with a woman's silent plea for sympathy; but the face before her was not the César's that she knew—merely a reflection of the cynical cruelty of those who dominated him.

Steadily then she faced him, and quietly she spoke: "So *you* are like the rest, and make brave sport of a woman's misery?"

A few simple words, but they expressed everything, disillusion, death of trust, and clearer knowledge—everything.

Saint - Maurice had nerved himself to stand her fierce reproaches; but no, she turned contemptuously from him as from a contaminating thing, and looked his way no more.

To d'Hercourt she continued, almost calmly. "You know these men were taken peacefully in their own houses."

"Then," Saint-Maurice spoke loudly, to show himself not less resolute and witty than the others—spoke as a man under a spell who merely repeats what is put into his mouth—"then we will execute them peacefully in their own fields."

"Execute!" she burst out, with a fine scorn—"execute! It is a cowardly murder of the helpless. Shame to such a King!—shame to such officers!"

"And Cavalier," supplemented d'Hercourt, "will be shot to-morrow at the post of Mont-la-Suisse." It was a lie d'Hercourt told, but he was curious to see how much her courage could endure. Saint-Maurice glanced swiftly at him. Was it true? He did not know.

"Cavalier! Cavalier!" The bitter news surprised Julie into a moan. "He taken! Then—that—is—the end."

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"Yes, that is the end," agreed d'Hercourt, settling back in his chair with the satisfied air of a man whose work is finished.

But Julie gave them no reason to glory at seeing her humbled. She held herself dauntlessly erect, and marched as steadily as a grenadier from the room, the uproarious laughter of them all following in a volley behind her. Her even steps died away down the passage towards the old west wing.

"Bravo, bravo, Saint-Maurice!" applauded d'Hercourt, clapping him on the shoulder; "you're of a fine wit, and neatly did you trim the wench's wings."

Saint-Maurice could have struck him to the earth, smiling fiend that he was. But he only smiled weakly, and his account against d'Hercourt was treasured up for a future settlement.

Saint-Maurice drank a glass or two listlessly, then made some pretext to slip away. Mounting his horse, he galloped at reckless speed wherever the spurred animal chose to go—out into the fields, along the desolated highways, heedless that in this land of desperate guerilla warfare it was courting death for an officer to wander from his command. Two hours he rode and thought and reviled himself, mad with passion at his own wretched cowardice. The cool air of evening gave him a purer resolution, and he clamored back to Rougemont to make himself a man again.

Immediately he went, as he had never done before, to the rooms occupied by Julie and her mother. He had determined to abase his very soul before her, to brave d'Hercourt and all the throng about him.

He rapped on Julie's door—rapped again, but there was no answer, only silence—boding, echoing, desolate silence—the silence of an empty tomb. He tried the latch; it was not fastened. Saint-Maurice paused only an instant—for he was determined now; then

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he opened the door. No one was there. He ran through the deserted rooms, calling "Julie! Julie!" No answer came. In a far room an old woman sat weeping in the gloom. He roused her. She glanced at his uniform, and shuddered.

"Where is Julie—Mademoiselle de Severac?" he demanded.

"Gone; she and her mother, gone," the woman mumbled, rocking to and fro.

"Where?" he shook her roughly by the shoulder.
"Gone where?"

But the old woman only waved her vacant arms abroad in the utter emptiness of her knowledge.

Saint-Maurice stood there in the barren room which Julie had used. The man's face softened at sight of many little trifles which he had seen her wear. Then all the fierceness of his self-condemnation swept across his face. He wheeled sharply and closed the door behind him.

Saint-Maurice strode furiously back towards the general lounging-room. Long before he could see within he heard the clink of glasses and the sound of laughter. D'Hercourt stood half in the door-way, carelessly leaning against the post.

"Here comes Saint-Maurice now," he called to those inside. "Hey, Saint-Maurice, your wench has flown, and the stanch old rebel too, her mother. Den's as empty as a last year's nest. She—but what's the matter, man; you're as white as a ghost?"

The little group of officers glanced up from their table to witness the sport as Saint-Maurice stood face to face with d'Hercourt. The pale young soldier said not a single word.

All the pent-up resentment of his soul, all his own mad detestation for his cowardice towards Julie, all the sneers and taunts of d'Hercourt nerved his willing

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arm. Julie's wrongs were boiling in his heart, but the pure girl's name could never pass his lips. He waited until he came in easy reach. Then he hurled all the power and vigor of his hatred into one stunning blow. Like a battering-ram he struck d'Hercourt full between his cold, malicious eyes. Another blow flung the man like the sport of a whirlwind against the table, crushing everything beneath him to the floor.

Saint-Maurice stood upright in the door, his face blazing with wrath, but radiant with the smile of his manhood's strong redemption.

Like a man who drains the cup of joy, he watched d'Hercourt disentangle himself from the ruins of the table, and saw a dull red bruise grow broader and redder upon his cheek.

The other officers stood about uncertainly. D'Hercourt would surely order his arrest; the offence was death. Several of them moved towards Saint-Maurice, but d'Hercourt waved them aside.

"No, gentlemen, there is a quicker and a surer way," d'Hercourt said, in a low, strained voice. "None of us here would turn informer—"

D'Hercourt carefully selected a sword from the corner. Saint-Maurice smiled his intense satisfaction as he drew his own blade.

"Outside," said d'Hercourt, and Saint-Maurice led the way.

No seconds were chosen and no word was spoken—this was not an affair for light conventionalities.

At the first level spot Saint-Maurice halted, and turned.

"Here?" he asked.

"It is the nearest," assented d'Hercourt, and the men removed their coats.

They were fairly matched—on the one side the hardened muscles of mature age, the ripe experience of

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many campaigns ; on the other, the suppleness of youth, a resolute hatred, a well-trained arm and eye—and a righteous quarrel.

It did not seem a dangerous game they played, so silently they played it. The smile had returned to d'Hercourt's face ; it was as if he merely tried his skill in friendly bout. But Saint-Maurice fought in deadly earnest, too impulsively, perhaps, plunging in and out, for almost in a moment when d'Hercourt leaned lightly forward and stepped back, the blood spurted down Saint-Maurice's shirt from a long slash across his chin.

"It will leave an ugly scar, my young cockerel, and your wench will not think you quite so pretty," laughed d'Hercourt, for his task seemed easy.

Saint-Maurice frowned and said nothing. He had no breath to waste in words. The stream of red saturating his shirt-front steadied the lad. D'Hercourt flung out many taunts, seeking to confuse him. But the best masters in Paris had drilled Saint-Maurice to hold his temper, and he remembered their teachings. He held his tongue and he held his ground more warily.

Then the end came so quickly no one realized it.

"Here's to spoil your beauty, my dainty bower knight," d'Hercourt called, making a feint to the face, thinking to throw the boy off his guard and run him through the lungs.

They closed and — the younger man pierced the other through the arm-pit. The smile faded on d'Hercourt's lips—he stood erect an instant, his sword flourished and dropped. Like a tree cut short off at the roots, he swayed to and fro and fell forward prone upon his face.

The others ran to him, turned him over. He was stone dead.

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Saint-Maurice glanced at the group. One of them, manlier than the rest, nodded to him, "Better go."

In half an hour a man mounted on a great gray horse, and wearing a fresh bandage at his chin, rode away from Rougemont.

But during that brief half-hour Saint-Maurice compelled one of the servants to tell him that Julie and her mother had departed by the eastern road, seeking an asylum in those freer mountains beyond the borders of France.

A few hundred yards from the gate Saint-Maurice paused to glance at a little bridle-path which climbed the slope behind the house.

Then he urged on his horse and followed Julie's route to Switzerland, himself a refugee and an exile.





II

LADY RESOLUTE

*A woman weak, by rebel passions torn;
A woman, strong through sorrows bravely borne.*

JULIE'S faith was shattered, her ideals crushed, the very altar of her worship desecrated. She could not forgive the lover, still less could she forgive the stubborn love she bore him. If she wept at times and in secret, it was more in humiliation at her own weakness than because of the bitter disillusion which had wrecked her dreams.

For nearly half a year she and her mother had been hiding in Switzerland near the Lake of Brienz. Quite a little colony of the scattered Cévenols were gathered in the mountains, and there was an armed camp of these refugees a quarter of a league from the chalet which sheltered Julie and Madame de Severac. These men Madame de Severac was equipping.

Julie went frequently to camp with her mother, especially at those times when she dreaded to be left alone at home to think. Her thoughts always turned traitor to her will, for they led her shackled to Saint-Maurice.

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Madame de Severac had by slow degrees drawn the whole truth from Julie, for the girl scorned to evade her mother's questions, or to lie. After madame's first outburst of anger, Saint-Maurice was never alluded to again; the subject was too hateful to the mother, too galling to Julie.

One afternoon Julie sat on the doorstep of the chalet, leaning against the post, dreaming. She half listened to her mother talking with the old Count d'Argental, the crippled gentleman who had made such gallant defence of his château against the King's soldiers. He carried his arm in a sling and could scarcely rise from the chair, but he hated vigorously enough to atone for all infirmities of the flesh. D'Argental was detailing to madame the sack of his château, and the whirlwind siege conducted by a Royalist officer named Saint-Maurice. Julie held her breath to listen.

"I live in hopes, madame," d'Argental repeated, "of meeting this man. I live in hope. And my son is bred and nurtured in but one desire—to kill him." The old man grew fiercer; neither Julie nor her mother mentioned that they had ever heard of this Saint-Maurice. Then the two discussed the expedition which would be ready to leave in a very few days. Julie gathered that this guerilla expedition expected to operate in the vicinity of Rougemont, and were well-trained sharp-shooters.

"It frets me, madame," continued d'Argental, "that I am not yet strong enough to go with them myself, but I have charged these brave fellows specially to kill Saint-Maurice by whatever means they can."

Julie grew colder as she listened. She knew full well the pitiless combat which would begin anew at Rougemont—waylaying from the bushes, creeping near the house, and shooting at the officers. Perhaps one of these men shot from ambush might be César.

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And swiftly Julie's thoughts flew back to the stolen sweetness of her trysts in the little glade. When her mother glanced down at her, the girl's hand was wet with her tears.

In her hours of heart-break Julie reproached herself for being so much weaker than her resolute mother; the girl did not consider that her losses were even greater than the older woman's. Madame de Severac had lost her country, home, and friends, the past and the present. More than all of these, Julie had lost the future.

That same afternoon, while Julie sat on the door-step, three men checked their horses some distance down the road.

"That is the house, yonder, my lord," said a native, who acted as their guide, speaking to a young man who carried a livid scar across his chin, and who rode a big gray horse. "Take that path to the left; it leads directly to the chalet; you can see but little of it from the road."

"When did you last see these ladies at that place?" inquired Saint-Maurice.

"Only the morning of yesterday, my lord; they have been there for many months."

"Armand," Saint-Maurice said to a huge-limbed Norman lad who rode behind him, "go up to yonder house upon some pretence, and see if the lady is there." Armand rode on, while Saint-Maurice turned his horse slowly away to a little brook where he might drink.

The thirsty steed had scarcely drunk himself content before Armand came flying down the road, waving his hat, his stolid face beaming with excitement.

"She's there, she's there, master, sitting on the door-step; I saw her myself."

"Thank God! at last," Saint-Maurice ejaculated. He tossed the guide his hire and left him to count it

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

over alone. It was a weary search from Rougemont to Brienz, but he had come to the end of it.

Julie saw their horses turn into the pathway up the hill.

"Here come two strange men, mother," she said; and both women went up the stair into their own room. There they stood at the window, catching occasional glimpses of the travellers winding up the path.

Suddenly Julie gave a quick gasp and clutched her mother's arm. "César! César!" burst involuntarily from the girl, and there was a clear note of joy in her tone. Madame turned almost fiercely to her daughter and demanded:

"Is that the Count of Châteaunoir?" She had never seen him during all the while he was quartered at Rougemont.

"Yes, mother," Julie answered, recovering her composure.

"Why is he here?" madame asked again, searching Julie's face.

"I know nothing of him," the girl replied, unflinching. Saint-Maurice by this time had dismounted and come to the door.

Julie slipped past her mother, and, scarcely knowing what she did, she crept to the top of the stair to listen. She heard Saint-Maurice inquire of the Count d'Argental:

"I am seeking Mademoiselle de Severac, and have been directed to this house?" he asked, most courteously, recognizing d'Argental for a gentleman. D'Argental shook his head.

"Monsieur is mistaken," the old man answered, for they were very cautious concerning strangers, any one of whom might be a spy of King Louis.

"Perhaps monsieur does not know the lady by that name?" Saint-Maurice persisted. "She is about seven-

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teen, tall, dark, and from the south of France—"D'Argental grew petulant.

"Monsieur, you have been misled. I repeat, there is no such person here."

Saint-Maurice was puzzled; he conferred aside with Armand. The Norman nodded his head vigorously towards the door-step as he replied. Saint-Maurice turned again to d'Argental, and began:

"I do not desire to dispute with monsieur, but I am equally sure the lady is at this place." Saint-Maurice spoke with great respect to the older man, taking due note of his white hair and wounds; but at the same time he was too decided to be overridden. There came a dogged, courteous determination into his manner as he advanced a pace nearer to the door and urged:

"I have journeyed far to find this lady, and been to many strange places; she is now in this house, and I trust monsieur will permit me peaceably to see her."

"And if I do not?" interjected d'Argental.

"I pray God, monsieur, you may attempt no such thing. The lady was here, at this very door, within the half hour, and I must see her."

"Your errand?" d'Argental demanded, curtly.

"Is a purely personal one, monsieur."

Madame de Severac, step by step, had followed Julie, until she, too, listened at the head of the stair. She remembered d'Argental's bitter hatred of Saint-Maurice, and feared an outbreak which might jeopardize their asylum. So she came boldly down into the hall-way. She did not know that the old Count had only seen Saint-Maurice once, in the dark, on the night his château had been carried by storm, and could not recognize him.

Julie crouched nearer at the stair; she could hear everything.

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"Ah," Saint-Maurice said, with a great relief, looking past d'Argental to Madame de Severac; "here comes Madame de Severac; she can answer me—"

But the woman did not wait his questioning.

"You are the Count of Châteaunoir?" she asked, peremptorily. Saint-Maurice bowed low, hat in hand.

Count d'Argental glared quickly at the man before him, surprised to see so young a lad. D'Argental flushed, then grew even paler, his fingers twitching nervously. The wounded man rose and paced painfully back and forth in the narrow hall-way, like a chained animal, cursing his feeble arm.

Saint-Maurice parleyed with Madame de Severac; Julie listened and saw, for she now lay prone upon the floor.

"Yes, my lady," Saint-Maurice said, "I have ridden many months searching for your daughter since—"

"Since," she interrupted him, in a fury, "since you drove us from our home; since you and your plundering gang burned and slew, and pillaged our country; since—"

Saint-Maurice raised his hand vainly; he could not stop her rush of wild denunciation. Through the tempest he listened quietly, and unmoved as a rock against which the mad surf dashes. When the woman had exhausted herself, he began:

"I came here to speak with Mademoiselle Julie de Severac—"

"You cannot do it—you—"

"I crave madame's pardon for speaking plainly, but there is only one person living whose denial I will accept. I must see her."

"I repeat, my lord Count, you cannot see her."

"But, madame—" Madame stopped him abruptly.

"Will monsieur leave this place peaceably, or—"

"Madame," the young man spoke with such an

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earnest determination that the woman could not but heed him. "Madame, six months have I searched for mademoiselle; can you believe I will depart now without seeing her?" As Saint-Maurice spoke, young Maxime d'Argental came round the house and stood within the front door. He hesitated at the threshold, astonished to find madame talking angrily with a stranger.

"And I tell you again, my lord Saint-Maurice," madame reiterated, emphatically, "that you cannot see Julie. Have you not already brought enough of trouble to me and mine—"

"Saint-Maurice," repeated young d'Argental to himself, taking a good look at the man as he backed out of the door again. He saw his father pacing the hall, and sped round the house, entering by a rear door. Father and son held a hurried consultation; Maxime nodded, and ran swiftly off.

In the hall-way Madame de Severac was still in high words with Saint-Maurice; the man had never lifted his tones.

"My daughter does not desire to see you," she said, positively.

"Mademoiselle de Severac must tell me that for herself," the young man answered, with quiet resolution. Madame became alarmed. In their situation as refugees they could not afford to have any strife or draw attention to their retreat. So Madame de Severac asked:

"And if I permit you to speak with her, my lord, will you then depart at once?"

"If she wills it so," the man promised.

"Upon the word of a gentleman?"

"Upon the word of a gentleman," Saint-Maurice repeated after her.

Thinking it, perhaps, the easiest way to be quit of

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

his presence, madame turned towards the stair. Julie had heard every word which passed. She rose silently as her mother ascended the stair, and stole into her own room as if she had grown weary of listening. There her mother found her listlessly gazing at the distant mountains. The girl fought desperately to maintain her composure.

"Julie," her mother said, coming close beside her, "the Count of Châteaunoir is below and says he will not leave until he has seen you. We can call the men and have him taken away by force, but this might cause us trouble, and compel us to seek another recruiting place. He says he will go quietly if you yourself tell him—"

"I do not want to see him, mother," the girl replied, without looking up; there was a fear of weakness in her attitude and a tremor in her voice.

"Julie," the mother gazed earnestly into her daughter's face. Julie turned her eyes away. "Do you love this man?" she asked, incisively.

"It is too soon, mother, for me to forget," she answered, without evasion.

"But think, Julie, think of all—" the mother began to say.

"Mother," Julie faced the elder woman with steadfast eyes, "I have thought of everything, everything which could be thought; all day, all night I think. Tell him to go; I will not see him." Madame bent forward to kiss Julie's pale forehead, then left the room.

The girl settled back hopelessly into her chair, then sprang up and darted after her mother to recall the message; she stopped and grappled with the balustrade at the head of the stair. Her mother was already delivering the denial. Saint-Maurice's voice did not falter.

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"I must hear that from her own lips, madame; otherwise—" His alternative was drowned by a clamor at the rear door.

Young d'Argental rushed in at the back door with drawn sword, followed closely by two men. Saint-Maurice glanced quickly from the front door; two others faced Armand, who stood by his horses and held them off.

"So you have trapped me, madame?" Saint-Maurice asked, pleasantly, of the lady.

"No, it is I," spoke up the crippled d'Argental, hobbling forward. "You are a prisoner to the Count d'Argental."

"Are you the Count d'Argental?" queried Saint-Maurice.

"I am," the pale man answered, a bright spot glowing on either cheek.

"Monsieur is a stubborn soldier, I salute you." The young man saluted with his blade as he drew.

"I regret," responded the Count, "that my unhealed wounds prevent me from renewing the matter now; but my son here—" Saint-Maurice glanced at the youth, a mere boy whom 'twere a pity to harm, and smiled.

Madame de Severac vainly expostulated with d'Argental on the peril a fight would bring to their cause. But d'Argental shook his head determinedly. Young Maxime hung eagerly on his father's word, burning to make such a notable capture. The pale man waved him on, and the three men sprang forward towards Saint-Maurice, who had backed into a corner.

D'Argental's men were hurriedly picked up, and the two who fronted Armand proved trifling fellows. Armand overbore them, and in a moment gained his master's side. Now the odds were nearly equal. Young d'Argental pressed forward once, but was

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so promptly hurled off that he could not bring his men to make another rush.

The other two beaten fellows hung round the back door and stubbornly refused to enter. Count d'Argental cursed them roundly, but it was no use.

Julie heard the clash of steel which quieted so quickly again. She peered down into the hall; there stood Saint-Maurice and his Norman in the corner. Fronting them were young d'Argental and two very uncertain-looking fellows, urged on by the impotent and raging older man. Madame de Severac was vainly striving to make him listen. He shook her off and forced the fight towards Saint-Maurice.

"Stop!" called Julie; "stop!" Her hand grasped the balustrade to bear her upright; her breath wavered, but she held herself steadily erect, and came, gloriously calm, down into the hall.

"Stop! my lord; stop!" she exclaimed to Saint-Maurice, her loud voice drowning the wailing minor in her heart. "Have you not yet had enough of blood and tumult, to bring it all again into this house of peace?"

The men stood back, glad of the interruption. Saint-Maurice's face shone with the gladness of his heart as he dropped his point before Julie. He had not heard what she said; he only saw the woman. His pleasure slowly died away at the cold deliberation of her manner. She advanced to the centre of the hall and stood before him.

"What does my lord want of me?" she asked. For the moment Saint-Maurice had been taken aback by her sudden appearance; now her rigid composure awed and frightened him. That was not the Julie who came to him so trustingly at Rougemont.

"What business has my lord with me?" she demanded again, her eyes resting with a fascinated gaze upon

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that livid scar across his chin. She could not look away from it.

“Julie! Julie!—” he began, confusedly, for he had pictured quite a different meeting.

“Mademoiselle de Severac,” she corrected, coldly. “I repeat, why do you come here to brawl, monsieur?”

“It was not my purpose, Julie,” he protested.

“What then is your purpose?”

“To speak with you.”

“I am listening,” and she inclined her head as to a disagreeable task. Saint-Maurice looked at the hostile faces surrounding him, and flushed; it was not here that he could humble his soul and own his cowardice.

“I am here,” Julie spoke, scornfully. “Why does monsieur hesitate?”

“I desired to speak with you alone,” he stammered.

“These are my friends; they are *gentlemen*,” she emphasized the word. “You can have no business with me which they should not hear.”

“Then you do not wish to see me?” he asked, incredulously.

“No,” she answered, with positive decision, looking him straight in the eye. Saint-Maurice shrank as if he had been struck; then he manned himself and approached her one step.

“Are you very, very sure, Julie?” he questioned, slowly.

“Very sure,” the girl replied, distinctly and finally; but she had come almost to the end of her strength.

“And,” the man persisted—those about had faded from his thoughts: to him there was only Julie—“and you do not love me?”

Steadily and cold as the icicle drips came her answer. “If that is monsieur’s business here it is quickly settled. It is not in the de Severac blood to love a coward.”

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Saint-Maurice flushed scarlet as Julie calmly ascended the stair and passed from his view.

The d'Argentals smiled exasperatingly, and their men, taking the cue, laughed out boisterously. Armand writhed, wondering at the patience of his master. One of the low fellows sneered, and Armand sprang upon him like a tiger, but Saint-Maurice held him back.

"To the horses, Armand." The Norman grumbled and made the horses ready.

Saint-Maurice paused only long enough to bid his unwilling hosts farewell; then he spurred his horse furiously down the slope.

Julie had drawn her leaden limbs up the stair, and reached her bed before she gave way. Her knees trembled beneath her; she buried her face in the pillow, and wept unrestrained. She did not hear her mother come to the door, and the older woman silently withdrew.

After some moments the girl lifted her head and listened to César's horse clattering down the hill. The sounds grew fainter and fainter. Directly she rose and went to the window—yes, there he was; he had not yet reached the main road.

And then she heard eager voices below—the Count d'Argental and his son.

They were watching the departing riders, and planning. "I had best go at once," the son urged.

"No," the father held him in check, "wait and see if they take the north road. You can go by the mountain-path and reach camp a full half-hour before they can ride the longer way."

Julie instantly comprehended. She remembered the deadly hatred of d'Argental for Saint-Maurice. Now the old Count meant to have him ambushed as he passed the Cévenol camp. Julie glanced again at the riders; they were not yet at the road; it was still some distance off; there was time.

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Julie came quickly down into the lower hall, and with the d'Argentals stood watching the riders pick their way out of the stony path. Maxime, all impatience, the Count all hate, observed keenly to see which way they would turn their horses.

Julie could not wait. She must do something, do it at once, she hardly knew what, perhaps warn Saint-Maurice. The distracted girl scarcely stopped to consider how this could be accomplished.

She backed away step by step noiselessly, and disappeared through the rear door, which opened upon a tiny, creeping path. This path, as Julie well knew, was the only other means to reach the Cévenol camp. Many times she and Maxime, through sheer love of the mountains, had made cautious explorations into its dangerous by-ways.

Soon as Julie passed beyond view of the d'Argentals, she turned and ran as actively as a mountain goat along this precarious foot-way.

Some distance farther on the girl clung like a fly to the bare face of the cliff, rounded safely a jutting crag, and turned to glance behind her. Maxime came running from the chalet and bounded up the acclivity, which at first was easy enough of ascent. Julie sped on with frantic energy.

She knew a place where the path was cut in two by a deep gorge across which a young fir had been cast to make a wavering bridge. The anxious girl thought quickly; perhaps she could not reach Saint-Maurice in time to warn him of his danger, but she might succeed in stopping Maxime with his message.

Full of this new idea she hurried on to gain the bridge before Maxime overtook her.

Fearless of the dizzy heights, she clambered along, over and round the boulders, until she crossed the bridge, and stood on the farther side of the chasm.

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She looked at the bridge, the waterfall beneath, then dropped upon her knees and began tearing at the loose stones which held the little tree in place. Julie worked with nervous strength, dislodging the stones one by one until the frail bridge trembled. She tugged and pulled the end around, and cast it whirling a thousand feet into the roaring cataract below. This done, she sat upon the ledge to catch her breath and wait, a bottomless abyss between herself and the path she had so lately travelled.

Only a moment she sat there, for almost immediately Maxime came crawling round the precipice, pausing at the sound of falling rock as if he feared an avalanche. The boy stopped at the edge of the chasm, on broader footing, and looked about him.

There stood Julie on the far side of the gorge, but the bridge was gone.

"You, Julie? You here? The bridge?" he ejaculated.

"The bridge," she answered. "It is there." Julie pointed into the abyss.

"But how did you get across?" Then he looked at her white face, and knew. "You—you—did—it?" he asked, unbelievingly.

"I did. I would not have him murdered."

Then she turned and went on her way, leaving the lad to stare, first at her, then at the thirty feet of space intervening between himself and the accomplishment of his errand.

Many hours afterwards Julie returned to the chalet by a roundabout path and faced the white-hot anger of old Count d'Argental.





III

EIGHT YEARS AFTER

*An older woman calmer grown;
A riper beauty fuller blown.*

EIGHT years had passed since King Louis with stern hand snuffed out the Camisard rebellion.

That savage but silent battle within the palace between the brilliant de Montespan and the astute de Maintenon had long been ended. Nearly twenty years before this the shrewder woman had driven the showy woman forever from her seat of shameless power. So steadily de Maintenon arose that she now held absolute sway beside the King, his wedded but unacknowledged wife. Under her rigid domination, Court and King took on an air of austerity in sombre contrast with the splendid sins of younger days.

One by one Madame de Maintenon succeeded in separating from the King every human creature who had a spark of unselfish love for him; even his grandson's wife, the sprightly Duchess de Burgoyne, had gone in tears from the royal presence. The King had grown to lean too much upon her lightness and her

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charm; so Madame feared the girl, and sent her away.

It was essential to de Maintenon's purpose that she reign alone. For every energy of her mind and body was bent upon forcing or cajoling from Louis that public ceremony which would make her Queen of France in name, as she had already become in fact.

These eight long years had brought many changes to Julie de Severac. Her mother died in exile, and her father's old-time friend, Antoine Crozat, the famous Marquis du Chatel, had half adopted Julie. For more than a year she had lived in Crozat's palatial home, Champfleur, as the inseparable companion to his daughter, Andrea Crozat. And Julie was even happy, in a way, for old Crozat loved her, and blessed little sunshiny Andrea fairly worshipped her.

The shadow which had fallen across her youth still lay unlifted on the woman's heart, but, be it ever so heavy, a shadow has no tongue. Whatever Julie suffered she bore without complaint or confidences.

The two girls lived quietly enough at Champfleur, one of Crozat's magnificent country estates not very far from Paris; for the cautious old man did not care to bring his precious jewel within the sinister circle of the Court. Andrea and Julie led a serene and cloudless life on this beautiful estate, in an atmosphere of sweet simplicity, even though surrounded by every luxury which the boundless wealth of Crozat lavished upon his daughter.

During all this while Julie heard only an occasional rumor of Saint-Maurice, sometimes seeking adventure in the far East, sometimes fighting their barbarous wars in Africa. She heard he had killed his colonel, d'Hercourt, in a duel—something about a woman, so the gossip ran—and could not return to France.

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Then suddenly one day, just a few months before, all the kingdom resounded with his fame.

The fact was, Saint-Maurice, after his repulse in Switzerland, cared little whither he went or what befell him. He disdained the shelter of his father's powerful name to secure him a grudging reinstatement in the army. After years of aimless wandering he wearied of foreign lands. So he smuggled himself into the army, fought for two years as an unknown volunteer in the ranks, then his opportunity came. By a glorious exploit at Denain he won his monarch's pardon and the royal thanks. And the soldiers of France exulted in their "Hero of Denain."

But Julie only shrugged her shoulders at the mockery of men's praises. She knew this man. To her he had proven himself a coward. The girl set her mind resolutely upon the one idea, and nothing could change it.

But it did disturb Julie very greatly to learn that this Saint-Maurice was the same "César" of whom Andrea occasionally spoke as the very dearest playfellow of her girlhood, and that many of his youthful days had been spent at this beautiful château, where Julie at last found a temporary peace. Here, perhaps, Julie would be forced to meet him again, for Andrea already looked forward to his coming. Julie asked many cautious questions of Andrea, but never once intimated that she knew aught of this man whose many virtues Andrea delighted so to dwell upon.

This was in the spring of the year, and Crozat had brought his two daughters—so he called Andrea and Julie—to Paris for a visit. Julie had a matter of business at the Court, which Crozat had long been waiting his opportunity to press upon the King.

And so it happened that on this particular morning, in the very early spring of the year 171—, Julie, at

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Crozat's city house, was dressing herself with unusual care.

She had about finished her toilet when the door was flung open and Andrea ran in—bright, blond, laughing, loving Andrea.

"Oh, Julie, aren't you excited? I would be all of a tremble if I were going to the King?" Julie smiled.

"No, dear, I am not greatly excited," but there was a decidedly unusual brilliance in the dark girl's cheeks.

"Well, come on, come on, papa is waiting." Andrea kept dragging at Julie. "Isn't papa cross not to let me go, too?"

"Yes, dear, your father is always very cruel to you, positively inhuman," Julie laughed back at Andrea, and followed her to Crozat.

Already at his breakfast, the Marquis du Chatel glanced up pleasantly from the table. Inscrutable as he was to men, here with Andrea he made no pretence to dignity—a thing impossible around such a hopelessly merry child.

"Sit down, sit down," Crozat said, "and hurry your breakfast; we are due at Versailles at ten, and must not be late."

This man, Antoine Crozat, Julie's self-appointed guardian, had been born a hedge-mender's son on the estates of the Duke of Vernais. Crozat's family, so far back as their humble annals ran, were serfs to the Dukes of Vernais. But Antoine was bred a foster-brother to the present duke, and their boyhood's love had never been broken in maturer years. Though the Dukes of Vernais were of the most ancient nobility, these two lads, sucking from the same breast, grew up together, neither of them heeding the impassable social gulf which lay between them—dearer than brothers of the same blood.

Crozat developed into a most marvellous man. By

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patient accumulation, gigantic successful enterprises, he had made himself richer than any man in France, except his sovereign. And a patriot, too, was Crozat. During the long wars he more than once came to his king's assistance, with advice and money, and the grateful Louis, years before, created him Marquis du Chatel.

Crozat knew his influence well, but was cautious about using it. He never asked a favor unless the time were opportune. Now he had a favor to ask for Julie.

Julie's family estates had been confiscated by the crown and granted to Brantôme for services in crushing the rebellion. During Brantôme's life, Crozat made no effort to seek a restoration, for Brantôme had powerful friends, and there were other difficulties.

Brantôme had just died without heirs, and Crozat deemed it a favorable moment to press forward with Julie's claims. He presented Julie to the King about two weeks before this, and was now going by special appointment for a second audience.

The day appointed for their second audience with the King had come, and Crozat urged Julie to hurry through her breakfast lest they be late. Andrea amused herself besieging her father for permission to go with them.

"You know, papa, I've never even seen the Court, and you go there all the time—"

"Another day, dear, another day; there is plenty of time; business first—"

Julie sipped her coffee quickly, and almost at once declared herself ready. At the door Andrea threw her arms around the other girl's neck, for there was really a serious side to the little girl. "Oh, Julie, I do hope everything will come right," and, half laughing, half petulant, she waved them a farewell as the coach drove off.

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When Crozat and Julie reached Versailles, they went at once to the Duke of Vernaïs. The Duke sat at his working-table, a man of fifty, slightly grizzled, active, alert, and a busy minister to the King.

He absorbed himself now in the examination of some reports from the far-away province of Louisiana, whereof Bienville was governor — that marvellous country, fabulously rich in gold and silver, which had set all France ablaze. The King's mines were being opened, and wonders were expected of them.

"Come in, Antoine," the Duke called, looking up from his work; then added, with considerable irritation, "Here we have another batch of complaints from Louisiana—" He stopped short, and rose quickly at sight of Julie.

"Come in, Antoine," he called, putting aside his work.

Julie was exceedingly reluctant to enter. She knew the Duke to be the father of Saint-Maurice, but she had never seen him, as Crozat kept herself and Andrea mostly at his country place.

This new life of Julie's had come to be very real and very dear, so she determined fully that she would not let the past stand between herself and any present duty. The girl went in gracefully, and acknowledged Crozat's affectionate introduction to the Duke, a man who had the frankness of his son, and something, too, of Saint-Maurice in the clearness of his eye.

"Take seats," the Duke insisted, with a familiar courtesy, "both of you; you have twenty minutes to spare. But, Antoine, you were always an early bird." The two men spoke more seriously then of Julie's business, she sitting a little apart.

"Is anybody opposing you in this?" inquired the Duke.

"No, I think not," Crozat answered.

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“I think you should have no very great trouble.”

“I apprehend none, except that her family was Huguenot. When I first presented Julie, the King seemed very much pleased with her—the girl bore herself bravely—and it is at his special request that I take her to him again to-day.”

The Duke, in a somewhat lower voice, cautioned : “Have a care, Antoine, that he be not too much pleased with her. I heard some such idle talk of her first audience. Otherwise you may arouse Madame de Maintenon’s resentment—a thing always to be avoided.”

“I will bear that in mind,” assented Crozat.

They had been conversing in a low voice; now the Duke remarked, in a half-hesitating tone:

“By-the-way, Antoine, César has been summoned here to-day, and I suspect it has something to do with this matter.” The Duke hated to talk of this, but he went on, “For you remember César was with the army in the Cévennes at the time.”

“Sure enough, sure enough,” Crozat agreed, “so he was ; but it has been such a long time I had quite forgotten.” Crozat wheeled, and abruptly asked Julie :

“Julie, do you remember the Count of Châteaunoir, or Saint-Maurice, as he is generally called?” Julie kept silence, and Crozat, thinking she was trying to recall the name, continued : “A tall, dark young fellow; you’d remember a streak of white in his hair; he had black—” The suddenness of his question startled Julie beyond power to reply.

“Yes, yes,” she stammered, “I do remember such a man as that; he was with the troops quartered at Rougemont.” Julie regained her self-command, and spoke very composedly.

“I wonder what is expected of César?” meditated the Duke, for the boy’s wild life had given his father much cause to wonder concerning him.

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"Well, we'll see what we will see," observed the philosophic Crozat.

"Yes, come," said the Duke, rising, "it is near the hour; I will go in with you. But, i' faith, the time has gone by when my name can add much of weight to yours."

They moved slowly down the great corridor—the stately Duke of Vernais, Crozat, with his keen gray eyes and strongly marked features, and this striking-looking girl between them.

Julie had grown taller these last eight years, taller than most women of twenty-four. There was a subtle attraction about the girl which did not depend upon the beauty of her features, her glossy hair, nor yet upon her warm, rich, southern coloring. She gave a close observer the impression of resolution, of quietude, and of strength. And, deeper than this, there lay an infinite sweetness in her smile, as if the woman's soul, conscious of its power, sheltered an abiding charity for the weak.

Some paces ahead the three would turn into the great gallery which led to the audience chamber. The main corridor was thronged this morning with statesmen, courtiers, flatterers, all soberly dressed in deference to their master's present humor—and all discussing the marvellous Louisiana mines which some Jesuit fathers had reported.

Standing rather to one side, a different sort of man looked out upon the human stream which passed him; a tall, sinewy fellow, with a thoroughbred, aristocratic face, much tanned by exposure. He bore a curious scar across his chin which was more interesting than disfiguring. A strange path of white crossed the blackness of his hair, for this distinguishing mark of Saint-Maurice had grown broader with time.

His easy, military carriage denoted at once a gen-

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tleman and a soldier, grave, courteous, and fearless. Differing much from most of those who flaunted their new patents of nobility and wore the bravest ribbons, this man's quieter garb bespoke the cavalier who thought more highly of the horse than he did of the harness. Standing there aside, he regarded the throng of passing greatness without awe and without interest, as a commonplace procession to him.

Saint-Maurice drew gradually away from the crowd as he came nearer the door to the King's audience chamber. There his steps grew slower until, as if to consider what he should do, he paused irresolutely in one of the little vestibules.

He looked back, and started violently. "My father," he said, "with Julie, and Uncle Antoine!" He recognized instantly the three familiar figures which came straight on towards him. "What can they be doing together?"

Yes, it was Julie: there was no mistaking that springy tread, the womanly dignity and composure of the girl. Saint-Maurice shrank back farther and farther into the vestibule, hiding as if he feared to meet her eyes—for his glance and thought was directed wholly to the woman.

When she had passed, he leaned out and studied her eagerly. Julie was taller, fuller, more sedate, with perhaps less of enthusiasm in her manner, less of the old riotous merriment in her eyes; but—she was the same Julie.

Saint-Maurice stood as one apart from the herd, heedless of the prying glances cast upon him—for he was a man who always attracted a second glance—absorbed in a thought which sped across the intervening years, and changed the brilliant gallery to the quietude of the Cévennes and the rough chalet in Switzerland where he had last seen Julie.

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But there was no time for reveries—this was an atmosphere to shatter dreams, not to build them. Saint-Maurice did not suspect it was on Julie's business that he had been summoned to Court to-day.

His last interview with the King, on the occasion of his pardon, although Louis had publicly thanked him for a gallant deed, had been distinctly galling. For the King, by direct inquiry, brought up the whole hateful subject of his quarrel with d'Hercourt. And the King lectured him scathingly upon the enormity of lifting a hand against his superior officer.

With this bitter taste yet rankling in his mouth, Saint-Maurice had no sort of relish for another dish. He had departed from the Court, as he thought, forever. But a king's order is not to be lightly disregarded, so he steadied his resolution and took his position in the constant current which flowed towards the most potent door in all the world.

Crozat, the Duke, and Julie had already passed the officer at the door, the crowd parting to give them way.

As they entered, a kind-faced old gentleman, very proud of a new cherry-colored coat, guardedly remarked to the lady on his arm, a remark which proved how far the rumor always outran the fact:

"There goes the Spanish-looking girl who captivated the King when she was here at the last levee. Poor child, how Madame will hate her! Come, let's go in and see what happens."

Saint-Maurice entered behind them all, and took his place in a corner well out of observation, for the presence of Julie added another embarrassment to the awkwardness of his position.

Louis had for the morning laid aside the exceedingly sober garb much affected by him of late, and wore a gayer coat with considerable lace—even a few jewels. These small items, showing the bent of his fickle mind,

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did not escape the jealous eyes about him. Beneath the majestic mien which never deserted him, Louis was restless and petulant, as if something had happened to thwart his royal pleasure. Madame de Maintenon sat quite near him, placid, cool, and keenly observant.

The old gentleman in the cherry-colored coat nudged his companion—inveterate old gossips that they were—and whispered something in her ear. They both smiled.

“Yes,” the lady replied, “I noticed it. The King meant to have this girl at his private Thursday morning audience; but you see how cleverly Madame has managed it.”

The old fellow chuckled at his despotic master being so helpless.

“Yes,” suggested old cherry-coat, “and I do not wonder that Madame is so cautious; that’s a magnificent-looking girl—magnificent!”

“Do you think so?” objected the woman, seeking to temper his praise. “She is far too slender to be of a good figure.”

All over the room Julie was being scrutinized and cautiously discussed. The men generally admired her, and the women tore to pieces. Glad as the women would have been to see this girl cause annoyance to Madame, yet they could not agree to an unqualified approval of the new beauty.

As for Julie, perfectly unconscious, she stood her ground with modest courage before her King, for she came of a blood which did not tremble or quail.

Louis spoke kindly to Crozat, and gently to the girl, remarking:

“I have not forgotten you, mademoiselle; such a suitor must be borne in mind.”

Then Crozat formally presented her petition, drawn

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up in due form, and the King asked Julie some questions concerning her family.

“My father, sire, was François, Count de Severac, killed at Namur, in your Majesty’s service.”

“A gallant soldier, sire. I knew him,” suggested the Minister of War.

“I remember; one of the few brave men I had at Namur,” added the King, for he was bitter yet over that inglorious loss.

De Maintenon shot a glance of hatred at the meddling minister for recalling a matter so manifestly favorable to Julie. The girl came of Huguenot stock, which was of itself sufficient to win Madame’s animosity.

“Did *you* assist our enemies in the Camisard rebellion?” the King asked: he was careful to frame his question so as to apply only to herself. On Crozat’s account, and for other reasons, he desired to favor her.

“No, sire; my mother and I remained at home; there was nothing a girl of sixteen could do. Mother and I were alone at Rougemont, until your Majesty’s officers took our poor house for their headquarters.”

“One of those officers, the Count of Châteaunoir, is here,” Madame complacently suggested to the King. “He can be questioned.”

“In his time,” Louis replied, impatiently. And Madame knew that the King preferred to learn first what this gentleman would say before questioning him publicly.

At the name “Châteaunoir” Julie paled a moment, and a rush of memories almost stifled her; then her composure came again with her resolution. A slight turn of her eyes showed her the black, uncovered head of Saint-Maurice, his gleaming white lock marking him apart distinctly from the others. And his very presence gave her a more defiant courage

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"It is a grave matter," the King said, guardedly, "and must be carefully considered."

There was one incident, however, upon which he was informed; so, trusting to the girl's good address, he inquired, with a show of severity which did not deceive any of his satellites:

"It has been told to me, mademoiselle," the King asked, leaning forward and looking her straight in the face—"it has been told to me that you took the part of some spies who were ordered shot. What of that?"

Julie instinctively turned again and caught the eye of Saint-Maurice before he could withdraw it. Between them flashed a recognition, and her unutterable contempt for a tale-bearer. Who else but he could have brought this story to the King?

Julie's anger nerved her to a prompt reply. Yet she chose her words with womanly discretion.

"Sire, it is true, and it is not true. I did beg of your officers that they spare the lives of two old men who were condemned to death—but these were *not* spies; they were old servants of our family, and one of them nursed me when I was a little child. I did beg of Colonel d'Hercourt to spare their lives."

There was no effort on her part to make a scene, yet the girl's low, steady voice, her earnestness and courage, stood her in better stead than any dissimulation or evasion could have done.

"Watch the King," whispered an old gossip in the corner, "how he settled back and affects to be displeased. He glories in her fearlessness!"

For a long moment there was stillness in the chamber. The King leaned forward again, and observed, most judicially:

"Mademoiselle, your petition will have careful attention in due time. You will be informed of my decision."

Julie's face wore a serious expression as she de-

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parted, leaning on Crozat's arm. She feared she had spoken too boldly. Of all the throng, she alone was unconscious of the strong impression she had made upon the King.

She and Crozat were already leaving the audience chamber when the King's valet detained them.

"His Majesty desires the attendance of yourself and Mademoiselle de Severac on the second Thursday."

"It shall be as his Majesty wishes," the old man answered.

Crozat knew the significance of this invitation, and it troubled him, for he did not like to see Julie's affairs grow complicated. Thursday was the King's idle day, when there was no council, and no crowd. On these days he gave quiet audiences when he desired to grant some special favor.

"And now, my lord," continued the messenger of the King, "his Majesty desires to speak with you a moment, at once."

Crozat looked around for some friend with whom he might leave Julie. The Duke of Vernais had gone, and Crozat saw no one; but the King could not be made to wait. And so, unwillingly, he said to Julie:

"My dear, I must leave you alone for a moment; sit here in the window recess. I will rejoin you very soon." Julie assured her guardian she did not mind, and could interest herself watching the crowd, so Crozat hurried away.

Scarcely had he gone when Saint-Maurice came from the audience chamber, and leaving the smaller room for the greater, found himself almost face to face with Julie.

His first thought was to pass by without a word, but he could not bear the swift contempt of Julie's eyes. By an uncontrollable impulse he moved forward towards the girl with whom he had not spoken since the day she turned away from him in the Swiss chalet,

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and he had borne the mockery of d'Argental's low crew. His hot blood rose even now as he remembered the bitter humiliation and disappointment of the visit.

He advanced very quietly, and, ignoring Julie's visible reluctance, began, "Mademoiselle—"

"I trust monsieur will spare me a scene in this place," she implored him, hurriedly.

"Believe me, mademoiselle, I mean nothing of the sort; I merely mean to express my great joy at seeing you again—"

Julie stopped him. Her heart was beating fiercely, but with all outward calm she said:

"If monsieur still lays claim to the title of gentleman, he will not impose his presence upon an unprotected woman who avoids him in every way possible—"

He bent down low beside her. To the casual on-looker his attitude was that of careful courtesy. He spoke rapidly and with low earnestness.

"Julie, listen to me—you are unjust now. Is it not time for you to let me explain? I have searched and sought for you, have felt no sting of pride at your repeated denials—for you have suffered a grievous wrong at my hands. I was weak, cowardly—"

"Monsieur," she interrupted him, coldly, "this is not the time or place to speak of such things."

"Then may I come—"

"No." She cut the question short with a resolute determination which admitted of no argument.

"Julie, have you forgotten—" They were speaking almost in whispers.

"Everything." She looked squarely at him. "Will monsieur kindly leave me now? You are making me unpleasantly conspicuous."

Saint-Maurice bore himself deferentially erect, and for the benefit of those who might be looking, bade her a most formal and polite adieu.

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In a few moments Crozat returned, and Julie hurried away with him.

Of late years Saint-Maurice had been tutored by a hard master. Much of the buoyancy of his heart had departed with the boyish color from his cheeks. But the sound of this woman's voice stirred his blood, and made him dream again the long crushed-down dream.

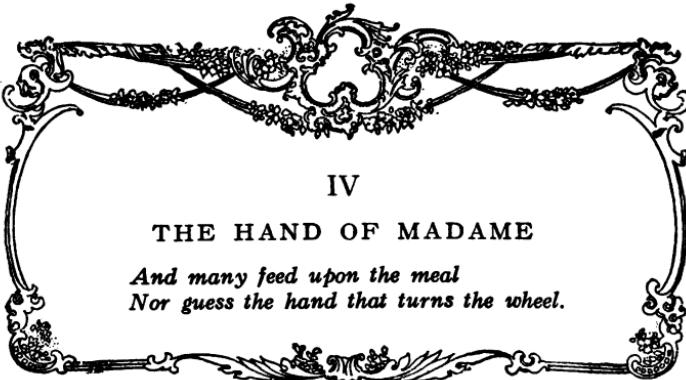
Silent and preoccupied, he threaded his way out of the crowd, forgetful of everything except that he had seen Julie.

Madame de Maintenon, whose spies were everywhere, was instantly apprised of the King's invitation to Julie for Thursday. She knew how desperately Louis craved young companionship at times, for she had seen how dependent he became upon the youthful Duchess of Burgoyne.

This vivacious girl would read to the King, tell him stories, and detail bits of harmless gossip in which the old man delighted. And these simple pleasures made the King chafe under Madame's grim restraint. Now the ambitious woman understood that the King had taken a fancy to Julie and would like to have her near him. But Julie was one of the hateful Huguenots; beyond, and worse than this, she was a woman; and it might be exceedingly dangerous for any Huguenot to have the King's ear while Madame's own affairs were yet unsettled.

Madame de Maintenon's brilliant fortunes had been too slow of building for her to risk their destruction—and she was a most resourceful woman.





IV

THE HAND OF MADAME

*And many feed upon the meal
Nor guess the hand that turns the wheel.*

PROCRASTINATION was never a fault of de Maintenon's. Her closely guarded king was threatened, and with characteristic cunning she sought to avert the danger. On the very night following the meeting of Julie and Saint-Maurice at Versailles, de Maintenon made her first bold move.

In one of the narrow, ill-lighted streets at St. Sulpice was located the society which furnished a "Retreat for Decayed Gentlemen." Few sought its shelter of their own free-will, for naught in its dingy exterior would attract those to whom the world yet held out a single hope. Secure in its commonplace seclusion, chance drew curiosity-seekers but rarely to its portals, and design brought none at all.

Though it was yet early in the night a new moon had long since vanished behind the gables across the way. Utter darkness laid its sombre pall upon

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the entry to this home of wretchedness and discontent.

Along the distant and more-travelled thoroughfares of Paris, the rattling hoofs of three laboring horses clamored through the night. Two of these horses were ridden; the third, riderless and saddled, was led. As they turned into this black, uncertain by-way their gait sobered down to a slow walk, perhaps for sake of safety, perhaps for silence and for caution. Feeling their way carefully down the street, they paused nearly in front of the Retreat, and he who seemed to lead, asked, as if in corroboration of his own doubtful opinion:

“Dupont, is this the place?”

“Yes, I believe so, but I cannot see a wink in this beastly hole.”

“There is that tall house yonder—with the double gables; if I remember right, our door should be directly opposite.”

He dismounted as he spoke, threw his rein to the man, and, groping along the wall, found a knocker, which he sounded lustily.

“Softly, softly, Purnon; remember, we are to attract no attention.”

“I did not suppose the infernal thing would make such a hubbub.”

Soon there was the shuffle of a cautious step within, and a low voice, indistinctly audible, came through the door.

“Who is there?”

“Open; it is a friend.”

“Upon what errand?”

“If you fear, you can open the wicket,” but the little shutter was already creaking its rusty protests at being disturbed this hour of the night. It slid reluctantly in its socket, and the gleam of a lantern came flickering through.

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“Well, what do you want?”

The man put his lips close to the wicket.

“From Madame,” was all he said, but this powerful name made instant impression.

The lantern was elevated to the level of the wicket, so its timorous bearer could satisfy himself that this unexpected visitor did, in fact, wear the well-known livery of Madame de Maintenon. To assure him further, Purnon now thrust through the narrow wicket a letter bearing her seal and crest, addressed to the Superior of the asylum.

Even these credentials did not quite remove the fears created by the stamping of the horses.

“I beg of you, my lord, to wait until Father Raphael may be apprised of the honor done him; he alone can open the gate after closing hours.”

The wicket closed, and the swift patter of feet died away along the distant corridors.

There was a long, silent wait before the visitor was at length admitted, and even then the priests cast distrustful glances upon a package of considerable size which the men bore, but no questions were asked.

“You wish to see Monsieur d’Aubigné, brother to Madame de Maintenon, my lord?” Father Raphael questioned.

“Yes; does not my letter from Madame give that permission?”

“It does, my lord, and that Monsieur d’Aubigné may spend this one night outside the walls, if he so desires.”

“True; and further,” supplemented Purnon, “that you have already forgotten our visit, and forgotten that the Count d’Aubigné has left your house, even for an hour.” The priest bowed.

A few moments later the messenger—for he was a mere valet and servant to Madame—was ushered into a cell where two men sat.

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"A gentleman to see Count d'Aubigné," announced the Superior. One of the men arose and came forward curiously. A sallow, thin-faced man with pointed beard and straggling hair upon his cheek.

"Ah, Purnon, it is you," he said, with an expression of peevish irritation. "Can my dear sister not allow me to rest even here—"

"Pardon, my lord," he interrupted, respectfully, turning to the Superior, who stood in the door listening. "Our business, father, is of the most private and personal nature. With your gracious permission we would be alone."

The Superior at once withdrew; the other priest, a small, weazened, stupid-looking fellow, with just brain enough to be obstinate, glued himself to his seat, a very pedestal of determination.

"My dear Madot," explained the Count d'Aubigné to that worthy, who kept his small eyes intently fastened on a breviary, "our business is quite private, and such as can have no possible interest to you. It will weary you dreadfully, I am convinced." Madot never budged a peg.

"A very dear and faithful guardian you are, to be sure," persisted d'Aubigné; "but see, you leave me in safe hands. Good-night." The Count most politely held the door ajar to permit his passage, but the blandishment was lost.

"My orders are never to leave you on any consideration," Madot replied, and with a decided and evil emphasis—"especially *at nights*."

"Yes, yes; I know your fidelity, and applaud it highly; but this is different; these are the orders of Madame."

"Madame's orders must be in writing, signed by herself," doggedly objected the priest, as if he recited a lesson learned by rote.

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D'Aubigné shrugged his shoulders, for many previous attempts taught him the futility of attempting to cajole, reason with, or bribe this pig-headed cleric. With an expressive gesture towards Purnon which said plainly, "You see how it is yourself," he gave up the fight, and turned to the other man for his cue.

"Here, my lord," Purnon suggested, "is a letter from Madame which may remove the good father's scruples."

The weazened Madot read it as if he little relished this abdication of his petty authority, and with an ill grace left the two men alone.

D'Aubigné's manner changed when the priest had gone.

"Well, what now, Purnon? What new complaints have been lodged against me? Have I not shut myself up in this wretched hole with a lot of pestering priests?"

"Of that I know nothing, my lord," deferentially interposed the man. "I am only charged by Madame to crave your attendance at once. The horses stand ready outside, and we are directed to escort you immediately. Here is a complete wardrobe more suited to your needs," and he called attention to the large bundle which he was already unwrapping upon the bed —everything necessary for a gentleman's attire. "You see, we might be challenged by the guard; a Sulpician gown would excite comment, and we are directed to show our passes only in an emergency."

D'Aubigné halted and hesitated; little minds are always suspicious.

"I pray you haste, my lord; Madame is most impatient."

D'Aubigné knew his sister too well to inquire of the man what she wanted; her inner affairs she never

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

confided to any creature. He walked to the window and pondered over the matter, pulling at his beard.

"I wonder what new whim is this, or whither I am to be sent. Perhaps—"

Wisely enough he reflected that, as she could so easily find a way to force his obedience, it were best to do as a matter of grace what his refusal could not avoid.

It was not many minutes before the three horses had turned their heads away from St. Sulpice, and, once out of that quiet neighborhood, the night riders galloped at a brisk pace until the city gates were passed. Then, without pretending further to conceal their hurry, they set out at top speed for Versailles.

Four leagues away, in her sumptuous apartments at the palace, de Maintenon waited, impatiently.

Soberly clad, but strikingly, her dark rich gown threw into dazzling relief the almost unnatural whiteness of her skin.

She paced up and down the room, glancing a hundred times at the clock, which monotonously ticked off the minutes—precious minutes they were to her, for the time grew short.

Middle age had dealt lightly with this marvellous woman. Her brow was still noble and unclouded; those great, slumbering eyes were yet as darkly bright as some deep tarn by midnight skies beloved. Her figure was still round and graceful, her step soft as when this self-same woman, as Madame Scarron, had pursued her cold, calculating coquettices some twenty years before.

She waited the coming of her reprobate brother. A rap upon the door brought a look of satisfaction to her face.

"Enter," she called. Her lady came, and, in a low tone, announced:

THE HAND OF MADAME

“Count d’Aubigné, Madame.”

“It is high time; send him in. Stay—but first open the private way. Place the key on the outer side of the first door. Leave the other doors ajar to the court. Then watch for his Majesty in the second antechamber. Warn me in full time of his approach. Fail not in this, above all things. Now send my brother.” The woman merely bowed, for Madame’s mood was stern.

“Wait! Mind you now, no listening!”

Count d’Aubigné entered, petulant and sullen. He greeted his sister with cold politeness. Madame’s glance enjoined silence until her lady-in-waiting had vanished through a little door behind the tapestry, first shifting the key, leaving the door closed but unlocked.

When they were alone the brother began:

“Well, my dear sister, what new persecution—”

“Hush; we have other business; that old matter need be no further discussed. First let me tell you—do not interrupt—I expect the King any moment. He comes from Marly, and direct here. Do you stay beside this door. When he comes, step out quickly, lock the door behind you, and leave instantly. Go to St. Sulpice—anywhere.”

As Madame spoke she moved quite carelessly nearer the door. With the quick movement of a cat she threw it suddenly open and sprang out into the passage. No one was in sight.

“We must have no listeners,” she explained. “When you go, *take the key with you.*” And she drew from her pocket a duplicate key, which she laid on the floor, beneath the edge of the tapestry.

“Why all this mystery, my dear sister?” asked d’Aubigné, languidly. “You are pleased to be dramatic to-night.”

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"Now listen to me carefully," said Madame, ignoring his question. "The King was to have publicly proclaimed me to-day." Her brother opened his eyes, the exultant light of triumph in them. "But he has been so worked upon that he breaks his promise to me. I will not be denied this one last step—I, who have suffered so much already, will win the uttermost of triumph. But Louis is in one of his unmanageable humors. Crozat brings to Court a wild-looking country thing, with just dash enough about her to attract a weakening old fool. He imagines she has a musical voice, and he would like to have her read to him. While the Burgoyne was here to keep him amused I could do nothing with him. This girl has been before the King twice already, and he is bent upon finding her a place in the palace where she can divert him. And besides, he intends to restore her a valuable property in the South which I had meant to secure for one of our friends. Beyond all this, she is a Huguenot, and none of them shall lift their heads in France so long as I can prevent it. This morning Louis notifies Crozat to bring her again on the second Thursday."

"Thursday?" ejaculated d'Aubigné, knowing well the significance of that day.

"Yes, Thursday," Madame tartly replied. "Did you not hear me? I have already seen Crozat; he declines to send the girl away, and I have no present means to coerce him; the King needs his money, and he is high in favor. I mistrust Crozat, and desire that this de Severac be gotten out of the way for a while. It must be done, and you must look after it for me. I cannot confide it to any other. Possibly a week or two, and I will be proclaimed. And"—she came closer to him—"and then I will make my dearest brother, the Duc d'Aubigné, a marshal and a Peer of France, for none other should call the Queen his sister."

THE HAND OF MADAME

D'Aubigné's eye lighted up an instant, then resumed its normal expression of low cunning.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"You go at once," she replied, "take this girl away; place her in *Le Maison l'Ombre*; it has been closed for years, and everybody has forgotten about it. There she can be detained until the King has full time to forget. You will find her now at Champfleur, with Crozat's daughter. They went back to the country to-day. Manage the details for yourself. I am busy here. My part will be easy. Leave me unmolested with Louis, and—" She grasped a waxen candle from the socket, and bent it, a shapeless mass, entirely to her will. The gesture was most significant.

"But, the exasperating old fool, sometimes I crave to—" and she dashed the delicate candle-stick into a thousand fragments on the floor.

The maid came running in. Madame turned towards her composedly.

"The King," whispered the woman, and disappeared as she came.

"That way — go silently." Madame urged her brother through the door. "Lock it and *take the key*."

She instantly seated herself beside the table and picked up a piece of embroidery. Her unruffled countenance gave no sign.

The door opened again and the King entered, found her busy and alone. She rose, the radiant smile of a loving woman upon her lips, and advanced to meet him.

"You have been so long gone; your Majesty's horses are slow."

The King's weary face lighted up; he glanced around.

"Your Majesty"—she spoke with tender solicitude, flecking a mote of dust from his shoulder; "you are tired—"

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"No, it is this new trouble in Louisiana that annoys me. Did I not hear the crash of glass?" the King continued. "No accident, I hope!"

"I am truly sorry; it was the Venetian candle-stick given by the Doge; I clumsily brushed it from the table."

All the while she was watching the King as he paced swiftly towards the secret door, removing the tapestry and trying the knob.

"I hear some one." His ear was preternaturally sharp. "The door is locked; there is no key." And he tugged at the door, trying to open it.

"The key?" de Maintenon suggested, as she went over and stood beside him. "It must have fallen." Slowly enough to serve her purpose, she picked up the key and placed it again in the lock.

"Some eavesdropper," she remarked, listlessly; then rang the bell for her maid to come and brush up the broken glass.



V

A PIOUS REPROBATE

*Though you've clinked your glasses with him,
Many wagers made,
Scarce you'd know him if you saw him
Piously arrayed.*

WHEN d'Aubigné made his hurried exit by the back door he stumbled along like a veritable pack-horse of trouble; not that a hurried exit by the back door ruffled him a whit, or furnished an experience entirely novel. It was the difficult task set before him by his imperious sister which dimmed the merry, merry sunshine for d'Aubigné.

“Easy enough to say ‘carry her off,’ but how the devil am I to do it from that old watch-dog Crozat? Different with the Mademoiselle de Crece—that was merely a brisk adventure.” And d'Aubigné grumbled on to himself.

By the time he arrived in Paris, d'Aubigné concluded that he must make a start at Champfleur, where dwelt the troublesome lady. He knew Crozat was not overfond of such gentry as himself, and wondered how he could arrange an invitation. Then he thought of Gaston, the young Count de Freret, who had formerly

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

been a ward of Crozat, and still lived at his house. D'Aubigné knew this young blade quite well, and determined to seek him at once. So he set out immediately for Gaston's lodgings in the city.

Saint-Maurice returned direct to Paris from Versailles, his unexpected meeting with Julie having taken his mind completely off a distressing piece of business which then fretted him greatly. This was nothing more nor less than the relinquishment of Châteaunoir, a property which for ages had belonged to the eldest sons of the Dukes of Vernais, and from which they derived their title. A sudden misfortune forced him to sell the estate, and he had just finished making the transfers to an *avocat* who bought for an undisclosed client. This left Saint-Maurice practically without property, dependent upon a very meagre income. The whole matter had come about through no fault of his.

There had been a younger brother—gay, happy, light-hearted Julian. Julian dreaded his father, who did not understand him, and always went to César for confessional. While César was so long in exile Julian slipped away to Paris and took up the life there, speedily becoming a member of one of the most dashing, witty, and expensive coteries at Court. Sometimes, after a particularly extravagant escapade, César remonstrated with him, and once they came as near to quarrelling as César's self-control would permit. César left Julian to his own devices, and now he bitterly regretted that he had not been firmer with the boy.

From the far north of France, Saint-Maurice was summoned one day by a disaster at home. Hurriedly obtaining leave, he hastened to Paris to find that Julian—there was no doubt of it, the boy had committed suicide. Julian left a pathetic letter for César, in which the whole tale was told—high play other vices, gaming

A PIOUS REPROBATE

debts unpaid, debts of honor and secured by notes signed with César's name. It was the old story. When these obligations were presented, César quietly admitted they were his, and paid them. But it cost him Châteaunoir. Saint-Maurice rigidly concealed the facts from his most intimate friends, and Rumor, that lying jade, reported that the hero of Denain had gambled and drunk away his patrimony.

César well knew the pride of Vernais. To learn that Julian was a forger and a suicide, would bow his father and mother to the earth with shame. It were far better that they should believe their eldest son a gambler and a spendthrift. There had been many improvidents in the line of Vernais, but no criminals. So Saint-Maurice never allowed the Duke and Duchess to suspect the truth. He took upon himself the burden of Julian's sin, and his father's condemnation.

Thereupon the Duke rated him so scornfully concerning his mode of life that it caused what might easily widen into a permanent breach between them.

On the day after his encounter with Julie, when it was growing dark and the shop-lights beginning to glimmer from the windows in Paris, Saint-Maurice walked mechanically across the Pont Neuf towards the lodgings of his friend Count Lautrec. He was thinking a little of his false position before the world, and before his father—thinking much of Julie. It might be that he would have to seek foreign lands again, possibly the glittering West. Naturally enough these reflections were unpleasant, and Saint-Maurice sought relief in the companionship of mad, pleasure-loving Lautrec.

Saint-Maurice had been strongly drawn to Malcolm de Lautrec by a knowledge of his history. Malcolm came of those firebrand Lautrecs of Picardy, Counts of Lautrec and Olbruze. When he was about ten years

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

old he had been sent away from home; the lad's mother was insane, and often a sight of her would throw little Malcolm into a frenzy. So the child was banished from the presence of his stark-mad mother, who did not know her own son.

This Lautrec, as had been their way for centuries, made a superb soldier, and no taint of dementia had shown itself in him. Yet he lived in a constant creeping fear, and during his quieter humors brooded over the evil shadow which clouded him. So he avoided quieter humors. He pursued pleasure after his own headlong fashion, and crowded more of life into his hot years of youth than cooler men would deem possible. He drank, gambled, fought, made love; he kept punctilious honor with men, and played the tender, lying traitor to women, all with a light heart and a clear conscience. His love garden sheltered many a tombstone, but their individual inscriptions were for the most part faded and forgotten. None of these things troubled Lautrec, for he was not the fellow to woo gray hairs by needless worry.

There was something lovable, though, about the very irresponsibility of the lad, and Saint-Maurice loved him.

Before Saint-Maurice laid his hand upon the latch to Lautrec's door he heard voices inside; Lautrec had company. Saint-Maurice turned to slip away and the door opened; Lautrec stood in the threshold, side by side with young Gaston de Freret.

"Hullo, Saint-Maurice," called Malcolm. "In the nick o' time; we were wishing for you this very instant. Gaston is journeying to Champfleur to-morrow, and wants me to go. Of course you'll be there in a few days?"

"Of course," assented Saint-Maurice, without the slightest idea of going.

A PIOUS REPROBATE

"Then you may as well ride with me," suggested Malcolm. "Gaston goes down to-morrow, and I expect to be two or three days behind him."

"Yes, César," supplemented Gaston. "Now, since you've come home again, Andrea is very impatient to see you. Besides, you haven't visited Champfleur since Mademoiselle de Severac has been with us. You should see her; she's the most attractive woman I know—"

"By-the-way," cut in Malcolm, whose tongue often ran away with his head, "Gaston, is that the young lady whom all the gossips say has captivated the King?" Before Gaston could reply, Saint-Maurice answered, quickly:

"I have heard what the gossips say. I knew this lady once, and saw her before the King on yesterday. She is a woman of great dignity, and—"—then he stopped himself, but not until he had attracted Gaston's question—"Ah, you knew Julie already?"

"I saw her once, years ago," Saint-Maurice admitted. He had a way of closing a conversation without offence, and the others pressed him no further.

The men had walked on down the stair until they stood together just outside the street door.

"Come on with us, César," Gaston urged; "there are some fellows at my rooms, and we are just now on our way to join them."

Saint-Maurice preferred any company to his own, so he linked arms with these happy-go-lucky lads and started to Gaston's lodgings.

The three were proceeding in a quiet, orderly fashion towards the church of St. André des Arts, near which Gaston lodged. From out of the narrow and dark Rue de l'Éperon they were jostled into, full tilt, by a very nimble-stepping priest, who flew along with his head turned back. The fellow held his cassock high

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

about his waist, and ran as if the very devil were chasing him. Without a word of apology or explanation, he untangled himself from the *mélée*, gathered his skirts, and started on again. But the *rencontre* had brought them within a gleam of light from a window, and as the priest looked up he ejaculated:

“By the smiles of the houri, it is Lautrec,” and other expressions, very unchurchly but vigorous.

“Yes, it is Lautrec, but who the devil are you?” queried Malcolm. The fellow stood silent a moment, as if surprised into an indiscretion, then having decided, questioned hurriedly: “These are gentlemen? Your friends?”

“They are both,” Malcolm responded, briefly and with some curiosity.

“As I’m somewhat pressed for time, I’ll waste none. I’m d’Aubigné, in a scrape—”

“As usual,” assented Saint-Maurice, who also knew the Count d’Aubigné and his reputation. “But ‘tis the common lot of man. Out with it—I’m Saint-Maurice.”

D’Aubigné spoke very quickly.

“Do not ask me questions. Which of you has the nearest lodgings?”

“Mine are but three streets beyond,” suggested Gaston.

“Then listen, gentlemen; I am pursued. Nay, it is no dangerous hunter that chases this enticing quarry. Naught but a miserly, weazened, moth-eaten, hang-dog-looking priest, with red hair, freckles, and ears like windmills, anathematized by the name of Madot, and who wears the garb of St. Sulpice—”

“Verily I’d know him by your loving description,” chuckled Gaston.

“Well, he claims to have the authority of St. Sulpice to return me to that hospitable place. Would you gentlemen kindly entertain this bench-legged, sleuth-

A PIOUS REPROBATE

nosed ferret until I can get into Gaston's good doors?" d'Aubigné had kept post at the corner commanding all the streets. "Yonder he comes," and without more ado he gathered his cassock again to his waist and took the shadows for it, running rapidly to Gaston's rooms.

The three gentlemen knew nothing of all this, but with that subtle free-masonry which man's follies always breed in men, they covered his retreat.

They waited all abreast behind the corner. Just as Madot turned, in a full run, they hurled themselves upon him as if by accident.

"To the foul fiend with thy awkwardness, incommoding sober gentlemen," swore Malcolm, catching the unhappy priest by the throat and feigning drunkenness, a cue the others were quick to take. Between them, they berated and reviled the poor, dazed priest, who was a stupid fellow, after all, until he turned tail swiftly the way he came, without so much as uttering a protestation.

At Gaston's room the serene scapegrace had already found congenial company in Mornay, de Brie, Naigeon, and the others. The bottle in front of him stood half emptied, and he was patting it lovingly when his rear guard arrived. His thin, long face and fashionably trimmed beard looked comical enough in the black gown of St. Sulpice.

"Well, did you stop him?" he laughed, boisterously, to his protectors.

"Ay, and famously," answered Gaston. "He ambled off again in the other direction faster than he came. 'Twould have done your heart good to see Malcolm play the drunken bully and frighten our casonned friend out of his errand."

"Now tell us, d'Aubigné, what's your scrape and why these clothes? Are we indiscreet to ask?" Gaston questioned his guest.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"Not at all," replied d'Aubigné, with a laugh, stretching his lean legs under the table. "You remember, Gaston, I promised to drop in on you again to-night, and I was trying to do it. You see, my dear sister is of a most jocular turn of mind. She seeks to make a jest of my piety and devotion. The saintly brother-in-law, too—"

His listeners could not restrain a laugh at the droll way in which this trifling reprobate referred to King Louis as "the brother-in-law."

"The brother-in-law, too," d'Aubigné continued, encouraged by the applause, "being in one of his most devout moods—for other people—has affected to be displeased by a few mild gallantries of his dear brother-in-law concerning some ladies near the Tuileries. And, would you believe it, he, with Madame my sister, so worked upon my natural godliness that I became persuaded I was intended for the cloister. After some modest protestations of unfitness for such a holy community, I entered the Society for Decayed Gentlemen at St. Sulpice. Note what a jovial garment they have arrayed me in. My family's solicitude goes even further. They provide me with a sticking-plaster of a companion who never leaves my side night or day—*especially nights.*"

The gentlemen had heard something of this before, so they listened with greater interest to d'Aubigné.

"I was out yesterday, on leave, called on our friend Gaston here, and when I went back for some clothing to-day the priests insisted on my remaining. This was inconvenient—you see, my devotion comes in spurts—very short spurts. I had an engagement for to-night. So I let myself over the wall, and lo! when I look behind me, there hangs this Madot—you saw the beauty—cheerfully waiting his turn at the rope. My engagement might embarrass him, so I did not tarry.

A PIOUS REPROBATE

The little wretch chased me all the way round through the Luxembourg, but I doubled back, and here I am."

As a matter of fact, d'Aubigné's present trouble was due to an oversight of Madame de Maintenon. She had neglected to inform the St. Sulpice authorities that her brother should be allowed his liberty.

"Well," laughed Gaston, "you are now free, and can join us in a discussion of the wine."

"It is a subject wherein I have much learning," d'Aubigné gravely replied.

Things could not have fallen out much better for the keen rascal, and he was quick to grasp it. He soon learned that Gaston, Malcolm, and Saint-Maurice were going to Champfleur, and he trusted to their good nature, his own finesse, and the jollity of the wine to capture an invitation for himself. At Champfleur he could see precisely how the land lay, and determine the best method to rid his sister of this troublesome Mademoiselle de Severac. So d'Aubigné uncorked his bubbling powers of entertainment with every bottle.

Gaston had provided a most excellent repast; the gentlemen fell to with good grace and loud approval.

Their noisy revelry grated upon Saint-Maurice; especially did the low wit of d'Aubigné irritate him. Again and again he tried to leave them, but the others kept him, for they had reached that deliciously appreciative stage which comes just before going under the table.

D'Aubigné was lurching about unsteadily, trying to gain his feet by grappling with a chair. The others were calling to him:

"Yes, yes, sing the 'Trenchermen'—sing it, sing it."

"Song, song," Naigeon, de Brie, Malcolm, were shouting.

But d'Aubigné did not need urging so much as he needed manageable legs.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

Saint-Maurice watched him wearily; that dissolute gentleman of unsavory repute was no favorite with him. But the fellow did have a capital voice, and the uproarious crowd kept applauding until he started on his song. He waved down the noise.

“Keep still, gentlemen, keep still while I sing—little song.

“Line up, ye valiant trenchermen,
Bold kettle-captains too,
Ye've room inside
Both deep and wide
For every stew and brew—
For eve—ry—stew—and—brew.

“The table be your fighting field,
The pastry be your foe,
The gravy dish
Holds every wish
The souls of men should know—
The souls—of—men—should—know.

“Sing ho! ye burly bottle-knights,
Whose pleasures never fail;
For wives are kind
And husbands blind
For flagons flowing ale—
For flag—ons—flow—ing—ale.

“Fall to, ye powdered popinjays,
Ye ruffled fops, begin;
When wenches smile
With lips of guile
'Tis time to reap them in—
'Tis time—to—reap—them—in.”

A noisier burst caught up his contagious refrain:

“"Tis time to reap them in—
"Tis time—to—reap—them—in.”

Naigeon's deep bull-bass rumbled away like intermittent thunder.

A PIOUS REPROBATE

It tickled d'Aubigné's vanity mightily to be so appreciated; and when the laugh died down he sought to raise another.

"Speaking of reaping them in," continued d'Aubigné, whose tongue ran loose enough to be dangerously truthful, "my sanctimonious brother-in-law has both eyes and one hand now upon a particularly charming harvest—though Madame little likes the cutting." Saint-Maurice raised his hand warningly, but it was too late to stop the fellow. "For she is particularly charming, this Mademoiselle Julie de Sev—"

"Hush!" sternly commanded Saint-Maurice, on his feet at once and vainly striving to moderate his tone. His outstretched hand trembled with his anger. "Have a care, have a care, d'Aubigné, lest the roof of my friend fail to protect a woman's defamer." In the sudden silence Saint-Maurice turned to the others. "I crave your pardon, gentlemen," he begged of those who were so abruptly sobered by his burst of wrath.

D'Aubigné looked at him in a half-simulated, maudlin surprise, and it were hard, indeed, to tell whether his speech was deeper in design or wine. He soon felt the discomfort of his position, and, replacing his Sulpician garb with garments of Gaston's, he opened the door to leave.

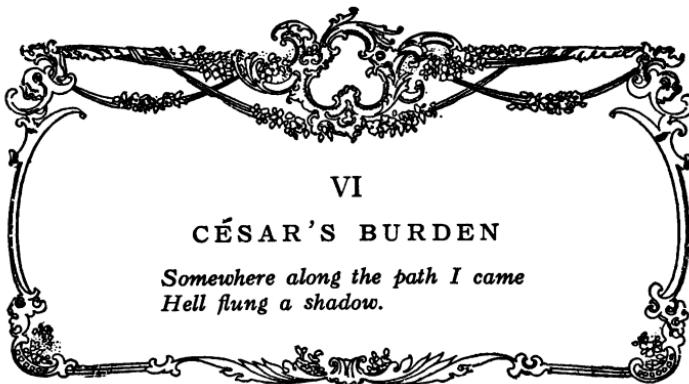
"Better get a carriage, d'Aubigné," somebody suggested; "perchance the sidewalks are unsteady tonight."

"No carriage for me," he replied. "I've prowled about this town somewhat of nights. The careful foot makes less noise than wheels, and is less observed; 'tis the better vehicle for a prudent man. Good-night, gentlemen, may Heaven bless you"; he raised his hands above them in pious benediction, "*Pax vobis-cum,*" and closed the door behind him.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

“That fellow came in to see me last night,” Gaston remarked aside to Saint-Maurice, “and asked a thousand questions about Mademoiselle de Severac. I wonder why he should take such a sudden interest in her.” Saint-Maurice had no reason to give for d’Aubigné’s inquiries, but the incident clung to his mind.





VI

CÉSAR'S BURDEN

*Somewhere along the path I came
Hell flung a shadow.*

THE morning after the supper at his rooms, Gaston de Freret had ridden forthwith to Crozat's country house, bidding them expect Saint-Maurice and Count Lautrec on the following day.

Andrea grew radiantly happy at the coming of César, and spent her time in wondering to Julie what he had grown like since he became a man and a hero. The girl's enthusiasm kept her from observing the constraint this news cast upon Julie. For the possibility of confronting Saint-Maurice again did trouble Julie greatly. Yet, as an enticing danger it lured her on to wonder what might happen. Yes, she would meet him, meet him fearlessly. She would not even avoid him; it might look as if she cared for him still. Julie doubted not she could show this man that the innocent country girl he had known was now a very different woman, and men of his stamp could no longer dazzle or deceive her.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

On one of these mornings while Andrea and Julie waited and watched, about a week after Gaston had arrived at Champfleur, two other gentlemen rode out from Paris, travelling in the same direction.

One, a tall, dark, and quiet man, with calm, meditative eyes, full of reserve power; the other lighter, brighter, and of more cheerful temperament. The younger man sang gayly, and bestowed his morning buoyancy upon every passer-by. The older jogged sedately along, his eyes fixed gloomily upon the road ahead.

Saint-Maurice had much to think about, much to worry him. The coolness between himself and his father concerning the sale of Châteaunoir had become very serious; for the Duke had plainly stated that this last escapade marked the extreme limit of his patience.

Now the son had only his commission in the army; that was about all. His other difficulties he desired to lay before "Uncle Antoine," as he had always called Crozat. Uncle Antoine had never refused to help, and kept silent. If this failed, then—the world was wide, and the sword paid every score.

Then, too, there was Andrea, the dear little girl he had petted and spoiled so diligently until she was twelve years old, when they separated.

These were the reasons which Saint-Maurice gave himself for journeying to Champfleur, and he tried in vain to fix his mind upon some one, or all, of them. Deeper in his heart, and dominant in his thoughts, the man well knew his real reason was—Julie; of this he brooded.

His sight of her in the gallery at Versailles had fired him anew, like a chance sip of sweet, exhilarating wine.

That wretched talk concerning her, coupled with d'Aubigné's base insinuations, angered him with a fear of nameless evil, and waked his strong desire to be near her.

CÉSAR'S BURDEN

Often Malcolm lagged a few feet behind to watch Saint-Maurice. Then his own face would grow sober with a full comprehension of the melancholy of his friend—the proud gentleman who rode forth into the world, bearing nothing but his name and his sword. Malcolm tried by laugh and song and story to rouse him from his sombre mood.

“César, I am simply devoured with curiosity to see this new witch who has enchanted the King—Gaston says she is at Champfleur.” Malcolm instantly regretted the thoughtless speech, for he remembered Saint-Maurice’s rebuke of d’Aubigné. The misdirected gossip of the Court was busy with Julie’s name, and Malcolm inadvertently voiced the whisperings.

Saint-Maurice, unruffled, reined in his horse.

“Malcolm, I know you do not mean offence, and I take none, but that subject is unpleasant to me.”

“I am sorry, César.”

“It is forgotten; let us not talk about it.”

Whether he spoke of it or not, it was the foremost matter in his mind. His first impulse was to turn his horse’s head away from the one human creature before whom he had cause for shame—turn to Paris, the frontier, anywhere. But no, his pride rebelled—his fierce desire rebelled. He could not play the coward forever; he would keep the engagement he had made with Gaston. More than this, he rode towards Julie simply because he could not help it.

A league or so farther on, Saint-Maurice spoke again:

“Malcolm, do you remember the young mademoiselle de Crece, who found favor with the King some years ago?” Saint-Maurice could not shake this idle gossip from his mind.

“Yes—why?” Malcolm replied.

“Was anything ever learned as to her disappearance?”

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"No, I do not believe it was ever explained."

"What was thought of it? You know I was away at the time."

"Her family made a great noise, and it was almost openly charged that Madame de Maintenon knew something about the matter. What made you think of that? It happened six or seven years ago."

"I do not know. It merely came into my mind."

They rode on in silence, until Saint-Maurice asked again:

"Malcolm, you were speaking just now of—a lady; do you think she is in danger?"

"Mademoiselle de Severac? From the King?" he queried, wondering where the danger could be.

Saint-Maurice flushed; he did not doubt Julie. "No, from Madame."

"I do not know; strange things happen now in France."

Malcolm sang and chattered as he chose, Saint-Maurice indulged his silences.

On their first night out from Paris they supped and stretched their legs at the "Fatted Calf."

With the witchery of a bright, clear moon upon them, Malcolm, who was restless, proposed that they ride to "The Sword of Turenne," some three leagues farther, before they slept.

They called their host and asked if they could get fresh horses.

"I am sorry, my lords, but I have none in the stable—"

"Now, now," broke in Malcolm, "the same story; you do not wish us to leave your house to-night. I saw as fine a pair of bays in your stable as I ever clapped eyes upon."

"True, my lords, but they belong to a noble lord

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who is to travel this way in great haste. He orders me, as I value my life, to keep his horses ready for instant use."

"Tush, Malcolm," interposed Saint-Maurice, "our horses are but little blown; we can make out with them," and they rode their own beasts to "The Sword of Turenne." Tired as they were, the night was so calm and tempting they sat for some time on a corner of the porch, half talking, half nodding.

Both men were waked to a sudden alertness by a horseman who came at brisk pace from the direction of Champfleur. This man did not dismount. He stopped immediately in front of the door and called loudly:

"Étienne! Étienne!" It was the familiar voice which caught Malcolm's ear. The light shone through the door, and both men at once recognized d'Aubigné.

Malcolm made a movement as if to rise, but Saint-Maurice held him back. "Hush, let us see what he is about."

"Étienne! Étienne!" d'Aubigné called again, impatiently.

"He seems to know the landlord here," Saint-Maurice whispered.

The host appeared in his door.

"Ah, it is you, my lord," and Étienne stepped down close beside him with the obsequious attention of a man who is being well paid. Malcolm and César were close enough to hear.

"How is my team?"

"Slick as a new louis," the host responded, glibly.

"Keep them well fed. I think my wife will be able to travel by to-morrow night, or the night following. Send a messenger to the 'Fatted Calf' and have those

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horses also made ready. The days are too hot for a sick woman. See well to the team." Then followed some other lower conversation, and Étienne returned to the house to fetch him a glass of wine. D'Aubigné wheeled about and rode rapidly off again the way he came.

"Now there's a gentleman for you," remarked the host to Malcolm and Saint-Maurice, bringing in the empty glass and fingering a bright piece of silver. "He's kept a fast relay here for more than a week, paying double price, and one at my brother's—who is host of the 'Fatted Calf'—a fine gentleman to take all this trouble for the comfort of his wife. He means to carry her to Paris by nights, when it is cool."

The two men looked at each other, then asked careless questions of the garrulous Étienne. The fellow had told all he knew. The pith of the matter to Étienne was that d'Aubigné paid double price and paid in advance—there was a gentleman for you.

"I wonder what that devil means to do with his relays to Paris," observed Malcolm, when Étienne had gone into the house.

Saint-Maurice was thinking. After a while he asked:

"Malcolm, was it not supposed that d'Aubigné carried off the young de Crece girl to get her out of the way for Madame?"

"Imps of Satan, yes!" Malcolm replied, springing up. "It was so suspected at the time—but—"

"Sit down," Saint-Maurice said, very quietly. Finally, Saint-Maurice brought himself to say what was in his mind.

"Malcolm, you know there is—a lady—at Champfleur—"

"Yes, yes, by the gods; I did not think of it!" He was on his feet again.

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"Sit down." Saint-Maurice pulled him back into the chair.

"Now, if d'Aubigné is playing a game of that sort—" thought Saint-Maurice. "But that is hardly possible; the fellow would not dare." Saint-Maurice's mind instantly reverted to what Gaston had told of d'Aubigné's apparent interest in Julie when he had asked such pointed questions concerning the roads to Champfleur, the inns, and all. Saint-Maurice had drawn this from Gaston bit by bit.

"And d'Aubigné knew this lady to be at Champfleur?" Saint-Maurice observed, half aloud, to Malcolm.

"So he did, so he did; he mentioned it to me," exclaimed Malcolm, springing to his feet. "He is up to some mischief, sure as St. Denis is a Christian. Let us ride at once—"

"No," Saint-Maurice reminded Malcolm, "d'Aubigné said 'to-morrow night'—Oh, landlord! landlord!" Étienne appeared at the door.

"A bottle of Mâcon," Saint-Maurice ordered. When the wine was brought he inquired, "How far is it to Champfleur?"

"Some six or seven leagues, my lord."

"Wake us early and have our beasts ready—"

"But you will want breakfast, my lord; you surely—"

"No, we will not ride away empty. Breakfast at daylight."

Étienne disappeared towards the stables and Saint-Maurice explained to Malcolm:

"We do not need to be rash; if d'Aubigné means to carry off this lady, as he probably did Mademoiselle de Crece, there is too strong a hand behind him for us to run against it in the dark. Besides"—the man hesitated before he voiced his thought—"besides, we must not raise a scandal concerning a young girl if

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the affair can be managed more quietly. We can easily make Champfleur before noon to-morrow, and that will be time enough."

Malcolm's headstrong impulse was all for catching d'Aubigné, and making an example of him promptly—on general suspicion. But Saint-Maurice persuaded him to wait for something more definite.

The men slept at "The Sword of Turenne" until early morning waked them. But the sun was higher than they planned when they took the road again, and it had possibly come to ten of the clock before the tall battlements of Champfleur rose into view.

At the same hour, two girls sat upon the far terrace at Champfleur, watching the dusty highway which led from Paris.

One was Julie de Severac, who so innocently threatened the peace of Madame de Maintenon; the other, Andrea Crozat, only child of the Marquis du Chatel.

As the critical women of the Court had already decided, Julie's face was somewhat less round than accepted fashion demanded of its beauties, her skin too dark for languid loveliness. Yet there was a "something about the girl" which even these women admitted, but could not define. This "something" lay deeper than the frivolous ones could see, deeper in the tempered sadness of her soul.

Those sycophants at Court did not see the woman of memories, the woman of dreams, the woman of resolves—the woman who held her heart too sacred for the idle wayfarer to gaze upon and jest.

The other woman, sitting there watching the road, manifested her impatience in a thousand childish ways, for Andrea's eighteen years had left her still a child.

Six years younger than Julie, by clock and calendar, Andrea had scarcely lived a day—one long, sunshiny, inconsequential day. If "campaign years count

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double," as the soldiers say, then years of eventless peace count not at all.

Every morning Andrea dragged Julie to this same post, to wait for Saint-Maurice, whose coming could only mean a trying ordeal for the darker girl. In this house she must treat him with considerate politeness, else she would draw upon herself many awkward questions from Andrea. So, anxiously as Andrea watched, Julie's eye was even keener, for she had no thought of letting Saint-Maurice catch her watching the road for him.

This was the sixth long day of a serious childish trouble to Andrea, waiting.

"Julie, do you think he'll come to-day?" she asked for the hundredth time.

"You'll have to be patient, dear, and wait."

"That's what you tell me every day, but I just cannot be patient; why, I haven't seen César for more than eight years!"

"Pshaw! Andrea, how restless you are—now you cannot wait as many minutes. Any one would think you were in love with this wonderful César of yours." The speech came before she thought, and Julie instantly regretted it, for a flitting cloud passed over Andrea's face.

"Oh no, Julie; would you? That's foolish. I do love César, of course, but—" and whatever the saving clause in her mind might be, the suggestion troubled Andrea no more.

After all of Andrea's waiting and watching, it was Julie who first caught sight of the riders close upon them. And while Andrea ran like a fawn round to the front to welcome them, Julie disappeared into the first door that held itself open to her.

Gaston, too, had seen them coming, and stood ready at the steps. "You scatter-brains," he called, before

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they got off their horses, "you played me a scurvy trick. Here I've been waiting for a week. I thought you were coming on so straight behind me?"

"So did we," responded Malcolm, "but things and things happened in Paris."

"Things always do," Gaston laughed, shaking hands heartily; "but come on into the house. You must be tired—and thirsty," he supplemented. Malcolm followed him immediately, but Saint-Maurice tarried a moment at his horse. Andrea came running from behind and caught César's coat as he climbed the steps. He turned and looked doubtful a moment, as if he were not so very sure, until she laughed.

"Well, well," he exclaimed, "bless the child, it's little Andrea," delightedly taking both her hands and holding her at full arm's-length, looking her over from head to foot.

"Why, what a long gown, and what a grown-up girl you are, to be sure. And, do you know, Andrea, you are ever so much prettier than I even hoped you would be."

"Do you really think so, César—really?" she answered, pleased, but not embarrassed.

"Yes, really; but you are not so very greatly changed, after all. I am so glad to find you here; I dreaded the long ride to Chatel to see you—"

"No, we expected you, and I waited here specially to see you; you should feel very much complimented."

He hesitated uncertainly for a moment, then Saint-Maurice threw his arms about her and drew her to him as naturally as though she still was six and he eighteen.

"Well, I wondered," she laughed, "if you were going to hold me way off there and stare at me all day as if I were some great curiosity. Your mustache certainly is funny, though," and she brushed her tingling lips with her fingers.

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"Why, what has become of Julie?" Andrea suddenly remembered. "She was right here with me a moment ago." Andrea looked about her, and not seeing Julie, she marched arm-and-arm with Saint-Maurice, vainly trying to keep step with his long stride.

"That's just the way you used to tease me, César, when we played at soldiers; quit it, and take shorter steps."

Saint-Maurice laughed. "I just wanted to see if you would remember."

Julie, who had evaded Andrea so deftly, was now seated at one of the upper windows with Crozat, and from there they observed the whole scene.

She smiled to herself at the frank affection manifested by Andrea when he came—that long-expected coming. Saint-Maurice's loving greeting at first came like the sudden thrust of a knife to Julie. For a single instant she could almost feel again the pressure of his arm, the warm touch of his lips, the happiness of his caresses. But all that was gone—why should she care? And Julie must, perforce, control herself.

Crozat stood leaning on the back of her chair, looking with her from the window. When Saint-Maurice came clattering up, they forgot everything else to turn their eyes upon him. Even the grizzled man of stone, Crozat the financier, could not repress his intense gratification at the meeting between his "children." Both Crozat and the Duke claimed these as "the children," making but little difference in the love bestowed upon them.

And Crozat, looking down upon his children, rubbed his hands joyfully to think the time was now so opportune for him to grasp the most powerful ambition of his life. Everything else that Crozat had done, all that he had heretofore accomplished, he regarded but

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as a stepping-stone to this glorious end. The day seemed now near at hand, and Crozat, eager as a boyish lover, waited for the harvest of his hopes.

Ages of hereditary loyalty had strongly bred in Crozat a veneration for the family of his feudal lord. Though he was himself a noble, though he was far richer and more influential even than Hector, though Hector was his foster-brother, Crozat always regarded the Duke of Vernais as his divinely sacred prince. To see his own grandson born a Duke of Vernais was the dear desire of the old man's heart. This desire he guarded sedulously, as a young girl secretes her first trembling love, and nursed it as jealously.

Now at that time his own dazzling success, and the great love between himself and Hector, had somewhat hewn down their inequalities of station, Crozat felt he might begin to take active steps towards the consummation of this last and greatest of his ambitions.

An unrebuked tear glistened in his eye as he watched the affectionate meeting between Saint-Maurice and his daughter. A new-made dukedom would not have pleased him half so much.

"Look at that, Julie," Crozat chuckled, like a boy; "are not my children fond of each other?" Julie only laughed—there was no gainsaying it.

"Would they not make a handsome couple, Julie?" Crozat could not repress the question, but it brought no response from the girl. A tear stood also in Julie's eye, but not a tear of parental love or parental happiness.

"Come, Julie, come, let us go down and speak with César; he's a fine, manly lad—a fine manly lad." Crozat put his arm about her—"Come." But Julie held back.

"No, Uncle Antoine, I must change my dress"—an excuse rarely made by her. "I will meet the gentle-

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men at lunch." The throbbing heart begged for time to still its beating.

Down-stairs, Saint-Maurice kept his eyes about him, expecting to see Julie at any moment, but he asked no questions.

When luncheon was announced the three men, Saint-Maurice, Malcolm, and Gaston, with Andrea, came romping in from the terrace, for the spirit of childhood and country freedom possessed them all. A sudden turn round the corner of the summer-house, and Gaston, running ahead, almost upset Julie, who was hurrying out of the garden, bearing a huge bunch of narcissus.

"Hullo, playing the maid, are you?" Gaston half apologized.

"Yes—have one?" she answered, gayly. "These are for the luncheon-table, but I can spare you one if you be very good." Her words died away, she stopped still, very still. Around the summer-house came first Malcolm, an utter stranger, then Andrea, with Saint-Maurice immediately behind her. They were close upon Julie. Expecting him as she was, the girl was not prepared for this abrupt encounter. She almost turned to flee.

"Wait, Julie, wait;" Gaston stopped her. "Let me present the Counts Lautrec and Châteaunoir." Julie paused, mastered herself firmly, and precisely as she had planned to meet Saint-Maurice she did it.

"These are the gentlemen," Gaston continued, "for whom we have been waiting." Julie threw back her head and smiled graciously upon them both—neither more nor less upon Saint-Maurice than upon the other.

"Julie, Julie, you know this is César," Andrea reminded her, for the younger girl was not nearly content with Julie's polite formalities. "And, César, this is Julie; she knows perfectly well who you are."

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"I would be very stupid not to know," laughed Julie, perfectly composed; "this girl has chattered of nothing else for a week, and quite wore out my patience with her guesses at the cause of your delay."

Malcolm all the while regarded Mademoiselle de Severac with a polite but evident curiosity—a woman with a possible future.

"Luncheon is waiting for the flowers," Julie apologized, resuming her way into the house.

The others followed, Andrea hanging on Saint-Maurice's arm, and he furtively watching Julie.

She had adopted a woman's most maddening tactics—that vague, intangible repulsion which is so elusive and so effective.

At luncheon Crozat talked a great deal; he insisted upon mentioning Denain and telling César how proud they all were of his exploit. Saint-Maurice scarcely heard him; across the table there he could see Julie's lip curl in mockery as if she thought, "You may parade your boastful courage before others, but I know better." Her passionate prejudice refused to see that here was a vastly different man from the one she knew, and hated. The strength, the nobility, the suffering in his face, all were hidden behind the one rankling recollection which so perverted her every thought.

The long lapse of years had dowered Julie with a maturer beauty, and the self-contained man felt a strange tugging at his heart. Once, when she turned a girlish, loving smile upon Andrea, it brought back to Saint-Maurice, with a shock, all their meetings in the little glade above Rougemont, when a far sweeter smile was his.

Malcolm's lines, meanwhile, were cast in pleasant places, for he found himself seated beside Andrea, and becoming much interested in the freshness of a girl who knew nothing whatever of life as it was lived in Paris.

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Later on in the afternoon, when Saint-Maurice went to talk with Crozat, Malcolm and Andrea drifted off together through the grounds. Before they came back Malcolm caught himself mentally resenting Saint-Maurice's very unconventional attitude towards the girl—in fact, Saint-Maurice petted her unnecessarily often, so Malcolm thought.

Then, Andrea had insisted on returning from their walk too soon, because she had not seen César for nearly eight years.

"I was a little chit of a girl when he went away," she explained, "but it doesn't make any difference now, does it?" And Malcolm had to admit that their growing up did not seem to alter them at all.

Saint-Maurice came out of Crozat's study, and finding Julie's polite defences absolutely impregnable, he took himself to Andrea, and they sauntered off towards the lily-pond. Andrea and Saint-Maurice spent the balance of the day walking about the estate, laughing over old times, while Julie made herself particularly charming to Malcolm by way of compensation.

Long after their usual hour, Andrea, Julie, and Saint-Maurice walked slowly down the corridor towards the girls' apartments. At the door the three paused, telling some other childish reminiscence; then, with a cordial good-night to Julie, an unconstrained caress to Andrea, Saint-Maurice strode, whistling cheerily, back to his own quarters.

The girls' preparations for the night were even more conversational than usual.

"How do you like him, Julie?" Andrea inquired.

"I hardly know; he was with you all the time."

"Oh, you'll like him; he's nice; he isn't at all changed, only bigger—and foolisher," she asserted, confidently. "He is not himself now," Andrea explained

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further. "He is so much quieter. Papa tells me he has had to sell Châteaunoir, and I must not speak of it. Oh, dear! I do hate to know anything I must not speak of," she sighed.

"Yes, gambled it away," assented Julie, under her breath.

Then a long silence, and a desultory taking off of things, when—"I wonder if he has a sweetheart?" came from Andrea, in a doubtful sort of voice.

"Oh, I suppose so; most men like him have a dozen," Julie replied.

"But—but—" protested Andrea, "he is different." Then, changing her tone, "I wonder who it is—who they are?"

To most very young girls, an unmarried man possesses individuality only on account of some love affair; married men possess no individuality whatever, because their love affairs are supposed to be forever done.

"Julie, is it nice to have a sweetheart?" Andrea questioned, after another silence. Julie, seemingly, did not hear. Andrea went on slowly about her undressing, stopping now and again with a garment half undone.

These two girls scarcely concealed a thought or desire from each other, yet there are always sacred chambers in every heart where no alien foot may tread. At this hidden door in the other woman's heart Andrea knocked by chance, but it was not yet time for her to peep within. She looked up in that way children have when some unaccustomed thought crosses their minds, and artlessly inquired:

"Julie, did *you* ever have a sweetheart?"

"No."

"Never for one little moment thought you were in love?"

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This was a new question for Andrea to ask, a new subject for her to be interested in. The older woman's face momentarily took on an expression of patient suffering, curbed by the reins of rigid self-control. Had Andrea been less intent upon her own thoughts, she might have noted it. As it was, the shadow passed before she saw it.

"Did you hear me, Julie?"

"What is it, dear?"

"I asked if you had ever been in love?"

Julie laughed lightly, as a woman can always laugh—with the lips.

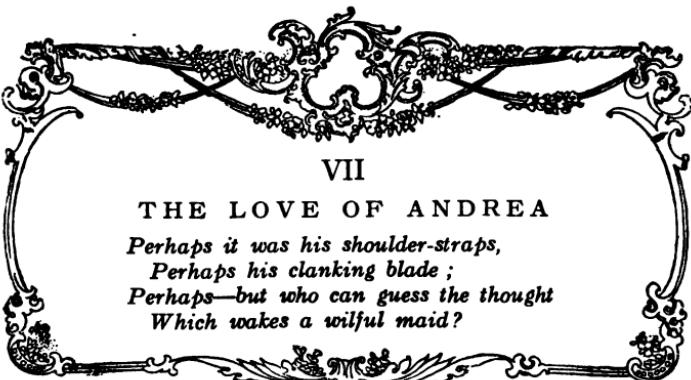
"Why, of course, a hundred times; what a question!"

Andrea's eyes rested reproachfully upon her friend.

"I did not think anybody could love that many times," she said, slowly. "I thought it was once and forever."

"That is the curse of it—to—some—women." Julie's voice for the moment was graver than Andrea's. But there is no earnestness which quite matches that of the child.





VII

THE LOVE OF ANDREA

*Perhaps it was his shoulder-straps,
Perhaps his clanking blade ;
Perhaps—but who can guess the thought
Which wakes a wilful maid?*

“GOOD-MORNING, Julie.” Andrea, dressed in a most exquisite riding garb, bent over the other’s pillow and called: “Get up, you lazy thing; it’s a glorious morning, and I’m going for a horseback race with César before breakfast.” She shook Julie, then ran to the door, standing there a moment looking back at her sleepy friend. The trim and smiling girl framed herself daintily in the door-way, flushed with a buoyant happiness, and waved her hand gayly to the other, then was gone.

Julie lay awake, stared at the ceiling, and thought. Measured by what she firmly decided to do, Julie should have been content, for during the entire week which Saint-Maurice had spent at Champfleur the woman had deftly succeeded in eluding a single *tête-à-tête* between them. Every time the man thought he had made an opportunity for a long, quiet talk, Julie slipped through his fingers like a will-o’-the-

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wisp. Indeed, her evasion became a diplomatic triumph, so delicately accomplished that he could not be perfectly certain it was intentional. And none of the others suspected the meaning of what went on before their very eyes. She joked and laughed with him naturally enough while there were others present, and the others were forever present. Every happening which put obstacles in his way seemed purely accidental—a continuous chain of intangible, exasperating accidents. Yet, thoroughly as she succeeded, Julie well knew her own discontent. And she thought of all these things while Andrea fluttered out to ride.

An hour later she and Malcolm sat talking together on the steps, and watching for the riders' return. Crozat paced up and down the porch; breakfast waited.

Malcolm was even less contented than Julie, for Julie brewed her own misery, while he must take his ready-made from the hands of others. True, Andrea divided her time pretty fairly, and gave him many a delicious hour, but the selfish fellow grudged every minute she spent in César's company. Sometimes, too, he grew a trifle sulky over the entire lack of formality between them. But the girl could always banish his ill-temper with such a merry laugh that he laughed with her at his own folly.

"Yonder they come; now we'll have our breakfast." Crozat had first heard the clatter of hoofs turning into the avenue. "Look at them! look at them!" the old man laughed excitedly as a boy.

Andrea's powerful bay, "Crusader," kept the lead. She turned in her saddle and laughed triumphantly at César, who vainly urged the smaller "Dragoon." But he struggled on far in the rear, a hopeless second.

Andrea was radiant. Her sunny hair escaped from its coils—she had no time to bind it up again—and floated out behind her like a shimmering streamer on

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the morning wind. The girl's cheeks glowed, and her eyes sparkled with exultation at beating César.

Malcolm ran out to assist her in dismounting, but she sprang from her saddle without even so much as touching the tips of his fingers, except to playfully strike down both the hands he offered.

"Better help César," she suggested, aggravatingly; "he's so slow and awkward he needs help."

Saint-Maurice flung himself from the discredited "Dragoon" with a decided gesture of impatience.

"Uncle Antoine," he grumbled, "you'll have to do something about Andrea; I never saw such a reckless rider—walls, hedges, ditches—everything."

Andrea shook back her hair—she had no pins to hold it up, and defended herself vigorously.

"Papa, it's nothing of the kind. He's just angry because 'Crusader' takes that wall so beautifully, and 'Dragoon' utterly refuses. You should have seen him trying to make 'Dragoon' jump; he doesn't know how to ride, and I laughed at him and made him mad. Listen to him growl—but he won't bite," and she stuck out her finger at him as if daring him to snap it. Andrea had drawn her father's arm about her, and from this citadel she did not hesitate to prod Saint-Maurice for being so poor a rider.

It amused Malcolm greatly to hear any woman jeer at the redoubtable Saint-Maurice, reputed a perfect master of the horse.

"But you really must ride more cautiously, dear," suggested Crozat.

"Yes, papa, but there isn't a particle of danger; 'Crusader' clears that wall like a bird."

"Will you ride with me to-morrow morning?" Malcolm seized his opportunity to invite her.

"Yes, it's great fun," Andrea promptly accepted. "I hope you ride better than César—it's very stupid

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going with him." She cut her eye at Saint-Maurice so roguishly that he laughed in spite of himself.

"Seriously, Andrea," he insisted, "you must ride more soberly."

"Yes, like an old marquise going to mass. Never mind, you'll get over being mad because I beat you."

"Never saw such a whirlwind of a girl," mumbled Saint-Maurice to Malcolm, as they started towards the breakfast-room.

Then Andrea turned to him with a brilliant suggestion:

"You and Julie must ride to-morrow, too; I'll go with Count Lautrec. We can have a jolly party." Saint-Maurice brightened and glanced inquiringly towards Julie. She nodded her cheerful assent—a wild cross-country gallop does not permit of confidences. Saint-Maurice began to think he might be mistaken, and she did not mean to maintain an attitude of hostility.

"Good idea," Julie acquiesced to Andrea, while the girl disappeared to arrange her hair. "And, Gaston, that will give you a chance to show off that boasted new hunter of yours. We'll have quite a cavalry troop."

César's hopes fell, for their cavalry troop had enlisted one recruit too many. What a fool Gaston was, anyway!

During these days it would have been hard, indeed, to guess which was the happier, Crozat or Andrea. The innocent delight of being constantly with César speedily made the girl forget that he might, in fact, have a dozen sweethearts—as Julie had vaguely intimated. Andrea had always done precisely as she pleased; she did so now. She tossed her head defiantly—Julie didn't know everything—and gave way wholly to her childish impulses. Not a flutter of woman consciousness caused her wide-eyed glance to lower, or brought

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a suspicious tremor to her unawakened heart. Except, sometimes, when he kissed her good-night, and his thoughts ran burning to Julie, then Andrea would wonder why his kiss should be so strangely sweet.

Neither of them guessed how closely they were being watched, or with what conflicting hopes and doubts and fears three other persons saw their unthinking intimacy. For Crozat, Julie, and Malcolm observed them keenly, all from totally different points of view.

Upon this idyllic foundation Crozat built an early realization of his rosiest dreams. He loved to gaze upon the two walking side by side, think what a noble-looking pair they were, and imagine how graciously Andrea would one day rule in the ancient castle of Vernais. The end seemed so natural and so close at hand.

For several days Crozat had been prepared to receive the Duke and Duchess. Hector wrote to expect them during the present week, or as soon as he could find the leisure. There came also a letter to Saint-Maurice; his father had business with him and desired him to remain at Champfleur.

The impatient Crozat could hardly curb his restlessness until they came. He meant to seize the first favorable opportunity, point out the young couple strolling together through the gardens, and propose immediately that the house of Vernais and the house of Crozat should be united in their children's love.

So Crozat watched them in hope, Malcolm in an uneasy fear, and Julie with a headstrong doubt, a sullen determination. It did not escape the observant woman that César's glance wandered furtively from the younger girl to herself, even when Andrea seemed in her brightest humors. And she found a malicious satisfaction in forever looking the other way—when he could see her.

THE LOVE OF ANDREA

Next to being with Andrea, Malcolm loved most of all to talk about her. So he and Julie spent many hours in confidential chat—confidential so far as Malcolm's part of the conversation was concerned. Sometimes, too, they talked of Saint-Maurice—or Malcolm did.

They were sitting talking one morning, while Saint-Maurice came galloping from the rear. Suddenly they saw him dismount to pick up a fowl which his horse had trampled down. It lay fluttering on the ground. He bore it carefully back to the stables, and spent some time bandaging the creature's broken leg.

"Look at that," Malcolm remarked, "it's just like César. He's a very tender-hearted fellow. There was a little incident connected with that affair at Denain which has never been told. A very young lad, next to him in ranks, became devotedly attached to César, followed him everywhere, and César loved the gentle lad. Well, the soldiers say, while César stood fighting in the breach alone, this lad sprang out of ranks and attempted to make his way towards him. César waved him back. The lad rushed blindly on, gained a place close to César's side, and smiled—the next instant he was shot through and through. César held his position over the boy, with one foot on each side of his body, and I believe that is why he stayed. When the enemy fell back and our men charged through, there knelt César with the dead boy in his arms, weeping like a woman—Yes, mademoiselle, it was pathetic," Malcolm added, after a pause, for he noticed the tears welling into Julie's eyes.

The post had just come in, and an interruption by Crozat saved Julie her tears. Crozat came rapidly towards them with a letter in his hand.

"The Duke and Duchess will be here to-morrow morning," he said, pleased as a child to have his foster-

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brother with him. "We will have another family party, as we did when Andrea was a little girl. Ah, here is Andrea now, and César"—for Andrea had gone over to the stable to see what César was about.

"César," Crozat called, as the two came on towards the house, "your father and mother arrive to-morrow morning."

"I will be very glad to see them," the young man replied, and nothing in his face betrayed the reluctance that he felt.

The next morning, when their riding party came in to breakfast, Saint-Maurice had become convinced that Gaston must be a fool, for the stupid fellow stuck like a leech to Julie's side the entire way. And therein lay Julie's skill.

Saint-Maurice assured himself he would have left Champfleur long before this had he not caught sight of d'Aubigné hanging round the neighborhood. He and Malcolm had begun to think that the cautious reprobate must have abandoned his plan—if he ever had one—against Julie. And then Saint-Maurice saw him riding alone through a little stretch of wood directly behind the château. So, as d'Aubigné lingered, Saint-Maurice stayed on day by day. A poor excuse, but considerably better than none.

The day was Saturday; the Duke and Duchess were expected. Saint-Maurice had already spent ten barren days at Champfleur.

Crozat did not suffer a disappointment. Hector came with his lady. Andrea flew to welcome the sweet-faced woman as she might her own mother. Saint-Maurice was graver, perfectly respectful to them both, but there lay the shadow of a restraint even in his affectionate greeting of his mother.

"I wish to talk with you, my son, after a while," the Duke remarked as he followed Crozat into the house.

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With his arm across Crozat's shoulder, the Duke walked with his foster-brother to the study. Saint-Maurice wondered what his father wanted, and rather dreaded the interview. The Duchess went to her room, accompanied by the girls.

"By-the-way, Antoine, before I forget it; I am charged to tell you there will be no necessity for bringing Mademoiselle de Severac to Court on Thursday."

"Why? What is the trouble?" asked Crozat. "That is very strange."

"I do not know the reason," the Duke answered, "but"—and he glanced about him cautiously—"it looks like de Maintenon. I cannot be sure; only a guess." Crozat nodded; they discussed it afterwards more at length.

All the while Crozat thought more of Andrea's affair than of Julie's; but he would wait a more natural opening to broach the subject.

The Duke, however, had a matter of his own which came up first. "Antoine," he began, "I knew César was here, and thought it a good time to speak with him on business. Will you send out for him?"

Crozat immediately despatched a servant for Saint-Maurice.

"The matter is this," the Duke continued, "and I will ask first what you think of it. You know of late César has not pleased me in all things—but it is unnecessary to speak of that. Since he has come back, and quieted down somewhat, I think it proper that he should marry. I have therefore negotiated a marriage for him with a daughter of the Prince d'Harlay."

Crozat closed his lips more firmly, and gripped the arms of his chair, but did not comment, while the Duke went on:

"D'Harlay's second daughter, Marion—a very suitable match. True, her dowry is not what it should

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be; but d'Harlay assures me it is the very best he can do, and we are about agreed."

Crozat sat stunned and bewildered; then he asked sincerely, as if it were of consequence, "Do the young people love each other?"

"I do not know that they have ever seen each other; but it is a very ancient and honorable house."

The Duke talked on until Saint-Maurice came. Crozat only thought, and suffered, and listened to the bell tolling above his most cherished ambition.

Saint-Maurice grew very grave and silent as his father laid the proposal before him—it would be a monstrous thing for the heir of Vernais to refuse an alliance contracted by the head of their house. His father finished, and the younger man did not object; he only said, most quietly, he must have a month to consider it; it was a very serious affair. This was reasonable, and the Duke agreed.

Then, their business being so speedily finished, neither of them desired to continue the interview, and Saint-Maurice bowed himself from his father's presence, leaving Crozat alone with the Duke.

While the girls were dressing for dinner, the Duchess entered their apartments. She lovingly assisted Andrea at her toilet, and then with an air of great mystery she inquired:

"Andrea, Julie, do you want to hear a secret?"—as if there was ever a girl who did not. "I just slipped in here a moment to tell you; you must not let your uncle Hector know it, but César is to be married—they have already signed the articles—a daughter of the Prince d'Harlay. I forget whether it is Marion or Céleste—one or the other. Is it not a suitable match?"

The shock came with a brutal suddenness to both the others. For one dumb instant Julie sank heavily upon her dressing-table, clinching a brush she had just

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picked up. She fixed her eyes upon the placid features of the Duchess, who hurried on to detail all the advantages of this alliance.

“César to be married,” the girl repeated very slowly to herself; the words were very hard to say—and she dimly wondered how such a disaster could befall. In her heart of hearts she well knew the man did not love Andrea, and had no fears. Then came this Parthian shaft.

The monotonous, sing-song tones of the Duchess irritated Julie. Why didn’t the woman tell it—tell it at once, all of it—and go? Then her eyes turned to Andrea. In a swift rush of pity, Julie realized the intense anguish suffered by this helpless child. The color vanished from Andrea’s face, her lips quivered, her limbs grew cold and weak beneath her. It mattered not what else the Duchess said, only two words ever found a lodgment in Andrea’s mind—“César. Married.” The possibility of such a calamity never occurred to her; she refused to comprehend it now.

Her dazed expression, her incredulous misery, struck close to Julie’s heart; in Andrea’s sorrow she drowned her own and forgot it. She walked over, put an arm about Andrea, and tried to smile at the mother’s gossip; but no smile came at her bidding.

All of this while—and it could not have been so very long—the interested lady talked on evenly, scarcely stopping to catch her breath. She wanted to finish before the maid came in. Now she remembered the tale did not arouse the usual chorus of questions and excitement demanded of girls by such a piece of news.

“But aren’t you surprised?” She paused, for neither of them had said a word.

“Yes, madame, we are—that is—I am surprised,” Julie stammered.

“Does César love her?” Andrea asked slowly, squeez-

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ing out each word as if her heart's blood came with it. Julie listened, even more eagerly than she, for the answer.

"That I do not know; he may not have seen her yet. But it is a very proper match."

Julie still said nothing; there was nothing she could say. Andrea had risen blindly and walked without a word to a vase at the window; there she fingered a rose, and tossed the scattered petals wide apart.

"I believe somebody must have told you already," the Duchess said, in a very injured tone. "Hector is waiting for me; I must go. Hurry, or you will be late for dinner. And mind, don't tell."

When the door closed behind the Duchess, the younger girl threw both her arms round Julie's neck and sobbed out:

"Oh, Julie, do you understand?"

"Yes, dear, I understand."

Andrea wept on without concealment; Julie's eyes were dry—dry and burning.

There was no longer need for her self-repression and stern denial towards Saint-Maurice. The matter had been settled for her, and she had no choice. It furnished Julie a small grain of comfort, though, to think that he did not love this other woman, or any other woman, even Andrea.

While the surface spray dashed into Andrea's eyes, the stormy deeps of Julie's heart gave out no sound. Julie stroked the other girl's hair, patted her cheeks, and kept a graven silence. Then some one knocked upon their door.

"Who is there?"

"It is I, mademoiselle—Fanchon; dinner is waiting."

"Come, dear, let us go down to dinner," Julie urged her gently.

"Oh, Julie, I can't, I can't. I don't want to see him

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again—or anybody else but you." She buried her face on the other's shoulder.

"But if you do not go down they will think you are ill, and worry you more." Little by little Julie made Andrea ready for dinner, well knowing how much braver any woman can be in the face of a multitude. Arm-in-arm they entered the dining-room, and no one noted that aught had gone amiss.

Andrea manned herself dauntlessly, and kept up a running fire with Malcolm, whose good-humor was genuine. Saint-Maurice had little to say; his mother and father did most of the talking.

Julie paid strict attention to her plate, and to Andrea, joining in and encouraging the girl when her spirits seemed to flag.

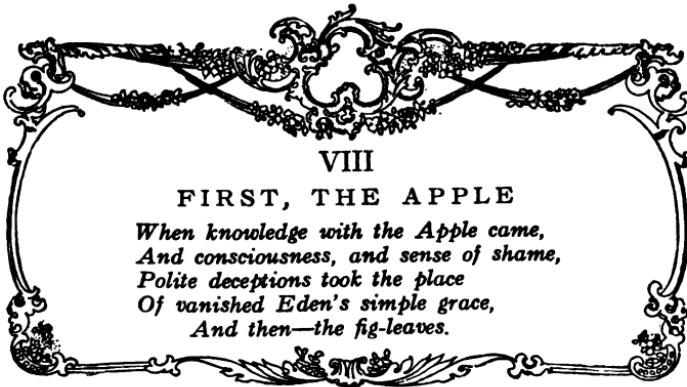
"Would dinner never end?" thought both the girls. "Would it be forever before they could slip away to their own rooms?"

After hours and hours, as it seemed, of nervous strain, they all arose from the table together. Saint-Maurice stood aside at the door for the ladies to leave the room. His mother went out, Julie, then Andrea. As Andrea passed, Saint-Maurice laid his hand caressingly upon her shoulder—a thing he had done unnoticed a hundred times before.

Now his slightest touch caused the girl to flinch and tremble, unconsciously to herself.

The old days and the old ways were dead.





VIII

FIRST, THE APPLE

*When knowledge with the Apple came,
And consciousness, and sense of shame,
Polite deceptions took the place
Of vanished Eden's simple grace,
And then—the fig-leaves.*

LISTLESS as the unstirred summer leaves, Andrea rose at her accustomed hour, and only Julie suspected no restful slumber had blessed her couch that night.

During the night Andrea had told without dissembling how insidiously it had all come upon her; how, in her delight at being with César, she saw nothing but the natural outgrowth of her childish affection. She only knew the truth when she learned of this marriage.

It was worse, far worse than Julie feared, for all the strong soul of Antoine Crozat had been the inheritance of his daughter. This soul, pure, vigorous, and believing all things true, she offered without a question and without a price at the altar of her devotion. Andrea, too, was yet young enough in love to love her lover's self; older women may love the love, and not the lover.

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All of that day and the next Andrea did not leave her room, until the inquiries and visits of Crozat, the Duke and Duchess, grew unbearable. When Andrea was forced upon the terrace again, she attached Malcolm to herself, holding completely aloof from Saint-Maurice. This gave Malcolm very great delight, for Andrea was gayer than ever, and manifestly encouraged him to keep his place beside her.

From this time forward Andrea felt an invisible barrier grown up between herself and Saint-Maurice. Insensibly she drew more and more away from him, thought more and more constantly of him. Before the revelation, her caresses were lightly given and as lightly forgotten. Now they were entirely denied, but those which had been already granted were carefully treasured up and glorified.

Confusedly she remembered all that had passed between herself and César—remembered as Eve might dimly recall that unblushing innocence which departed when the apple came.

Saint-Maurice—who had not eaten of the apple—knew nothing of this, and wondered in his stupid ignorance. He even began to think that possibly Julie had prejudiced his little playfellow against him, and more than ever he marvelled at the vagaries of women.

As the days went by and it became more distinctly apparent that Andrea purposely avoided him, Saint-Maurice determined that he would at least know what the trouble was.

Malcolm kept industriously at Andrea's side, and if he strayed a step she always found a gentle means to draw him back again. One morning César watched her steal away from the house alone, glance around to see if she was observed, and hurry off. He waited quietly until she was settled in a retired part of the grounds, then, as if accidentally, he came upon her.

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“Why, Andrea, what are you doing here by yourself?” Saint-Maurice bent down to stroke her curls, but she drew herself back somewhat stiffly; another reminder of altered relations.

“Oh, nothing,” she replied, uneasily; “it is pleasant here in the mornings, and I wanted to read. But I think now I will go back to the house. It’s too glaring for my eyes,” and she rose quickly.

“Wait a minute, dear.” Saint-Maurice pressed her to a seat again, and sat down near her, trying his best to resume the old, natural air.

“What is it you have?”

“Just a book I am reading.”

“Andrea, dear, tell me why it is you have avoided me these last few days?” Saint-Maurice questioned her gently.

“Avoided you? I—” protested the girl.

“I may be mistaken, but it seems to me there is a great change in your manner towards me. Have I done anything, said anything, to wound you? I notice, too, that you hold me at such a distance now, so unlike your old affection.”

The troubled girl did not raise her eyes from the ground as the man went on earnestly.

“You do not know how dear you have always been to me—the purest relationship of my life. Any man may have a world of sweethearts, but such an absolutely loyal friend—” Somehow the word “friend” did not seem to please either the girl or Saint-Maurice.

Andrea still was silent—silent and wretched.

“I followed you here to ask why you seem to have drawn away from me so. Do you think I do not feel it keenly that you no longer kiss me good-night, as you do my father?”

“Oh, César!” and had he been less earnest he must have observed the pleading in her eyes, for she could

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stand but little more. His departure for the army, to which she now looked forward with dread, and this crushing marriage, was enough without this.

"I do not believe I am mistaken," he went on, full of his purpose to clear up any trivial misunderstanding. "Tell me now, what is the matter, Andrea? There should be no concealment or pride between us."

"Nothing, César, nothing; that is—I have just been—"

"Yes, there *is* something. Now tell it to me. Do you know any one in all the world to whom you would go first with some little worry?" He took both her hands and looked down upon her, but as yet she had never suffered him to catch her eye.

"Yes, there *is* something on your mind; tell me—tell me, dear."

But the girl, tortured beyond endurance, only put her hands to her face and burst into tears. Saint-Maurice caught her to him, stroked her hair, soothingly. "Tell me, Andrea, what is it distresses you so?" The girl sobbed on and on, but, being once in his arms, clung closely to him.

"Are you ill?"

"No."

"Andrea, listen. No one in this world loves you just as I do, or as dearly; you know that. Can you not remember how many times you have come to me with your baby troubles and let me make them all right again for you?"

"Yes," he could hear, murmured faintly. But the girl shivered and still held down her face.

How strange it seemed to her; she could feel his very heart beating against her own; his arms were close twined about her, and yet—and yet—there was no sense of nearness. His bungling consolation only added keener pangs to his denial. He was immeasurably distant, far away as the empty heavens.

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She did not raise her eyes, did not dare listen, yet her ears strained themselves to the uttermost tension, craving, pleading as a tired, tired child might plead, for what she would never hear.

Why was it, she wondered, she could not simply throw her arms about his neck as in the old, old days, weep out her vague, indefinite sorrow, and let him rally her back again to laughter? She had done it a thousand times. No, those days were now and forever dead. Yearningly, wistfully, she longed for his touch, his companionship, his tenderness; and while he seemed to give all, everything, so luxuriantly, she bitterly realized that the breath of life was lacking in the sudden clay he gave. Andrea realized what she could not know, understood what she had never learned, comprehended what no tongue had told her; she dimly marvelled at what it all could mean, and wondered why she wept.

Awkward as will ever be the man who tries to sympathize with a woman whom he does not wholly love, Saint-Maurice asked her questions.

“Is your father in any trouble?”

“No.”

“Can I help you?” And he flung her again a handful of worthless husks where she craved the golden grain.

“No, César, no one can help me;” for she realized it all.

She tore herself loose and left him standing there alone. Saint-Maurice mechanically picked up the forgotten book, and stood watching Andrea until she disappeared from view. Then he sat down upon the bench she had occupied and tried to think the matter out. But such reasonings are not for men.

“I do wonder,” he mused, “if the poor child has some love affair which she is ashamed to tell me.”

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Saint-Maurice selfishly hoped that this could not be true, for the distance at which Julie held him made the man feel his utter loneliness. He did not want Andrea, but possibly the dog in the manger questioned himself no more closely as to whether or not he loved the hay.

It must have been about dusk when Andrea came noiselessly into the room where Julie waited for her. The girl was a little paler, and her eyes were red. She said nothing to Julie, but went to her place by the window. Julie rose and walked over to her. She settled down on the floor beside Andrea, threw both her arms around the girl, and laid a tender cheek to hers. Andrea knew that Julie understood—completely.

The lamps had not yet been lighted; they talked a little, almost in whispers.

Andrea, encouraged by Julie's subtle sympathy, told her everything—how suddenly César had come upon her in the garden, and what transpired there. She told how he questioned her, questions she could not answer—how he held her close to him until she trembled, and wept, and ran away.

And the darker woman knew there could be but one meaning to all of this. Even as she soothed Andrea she felt a triumphant pity for the girl, a wild, tumultuous joy that this man should be so uncomprehending of another woman—she revelled in the fierce sweetness of the thought that no matter what else came, his love was hers—hers—hers. And then Julie hated herself all the more for the selfish thrill it gave her to find a pleasure in what was Andrea's desolation.

So Julie honestly strove harder to comfort the girl. But while her lips, her words, her endearments were for Andrea, her thoughts were for César.

Her lips, giving to her heart the lie, made light of the idea of eternal love. She even gently chided Andrea,

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in a vain effort to prove herself free from the very weakness she condemned.

"That is all well enough, Julie, well enough for you to preach, but you do not *know*; I just cannot throw it aside—yet."

"But, dear, you should be stronger, more reasonable, more resolute; make up your mind firmly—"

"Oh, I know it must look easy enough to you, Julie, you who never knew what it is to love," Andrea's words stumbled tiredly along. "Maybe," the younger girl went on, seizing the one vain hope which seemed to hold itself out to her, "maybe after years and years the remembrance of it all may be sweet, even if it is so unhappy now. Do you think so, Julie—do you?" and the eager pathos of her question struck deep into Julie's troubled soul. "But," sobbed Andrea, turning wearily away, "how should *you* know?"

"How should *I* know?" The dark-haired woman slowly repeated the sentence, giving it a newer emphasis of desolation. "How should *I* know?" There was a harsh ring to her voice.

Andrea glanced up, and asked again:

"Julie, truly, were *you* ever in love? You speak so strangely."

"I dreamed it—once—long, long ago. Oh! so *very* long ago."

"Is it not sweet to look back upon, even if it be gone?"

"No! I was a fool. It is not that which I remember."

Julie rose, towering above the crouching girl at her feet. Her hand rested, clinching and unclenching, upon the table, her voice, full and strong, matching the snapping sparkle of her eyes—dilated eyes, gazing far and away into the distance. Andrea was mute and amazed at this swift change in the Julie she thought she knew so well. A sudden, bitter memory had forced

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itself upon the cold, dark woman, stung beyond control by Andrea's suggestion that she "could not understand." Then words came swift—burning, tempestuous words, which scorched her lips as she hurled them in a molten torrent upon the other's head.

"Dear God! what have you to worry you? A woman can endure anything more patiently than an unworthy love which degrades her. Such love brings no sweetness—ah, dear God! none. If anything now makes me think of those days, it is not the sweetness which I remember. Instead, I see the blazing houses of my people; see the crimson glare against the soft Cévenol skies; see their charred bodies in the ashes; see their harried fields. I see the miserable groups of prisoners, chained together like beasts, dragging themselves along to keep pace with their mounted guard. Look! Their road leads through a stretch of wood; two by two, their white blouses are hidden as I watch; I see them plainly as I see you now, see them enter the shadow of the trees. A spiteful volley rattles among the brush; perhaps a finishing shot or two comes after—I know that these are fired at some poor wretches writhing on the ground—then the guard rides on—alone. And I creep out, a little, frightened child, to view the butcher's work they've left behind. 'Tis that—ah, God of justice! God of vengeance!—'tis that for me to remember. All of this I see, and more. I see him—*him*—riding across the field, his waving blade red with the blood of the helpless. Yes, Andrea, poor little fool that I was, I loved for a time this debonair young soldier, until one day—but let us not talk of it. If I remember him now it is with hate and horror—hate and horror. For that was not the worst—oh, dear God! no."

Her sinking voice merged softly in the silence. She drooped again beside the table, her head resting on

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her impotent hands. The passion of the moment was gone.

Andrea was dumb, she only stared in wonderment.

"How should *I* know?" Julie continued. "Dear God!—that is how."

Andrea had involuntarily risen, gazing fixedly from the window into the darkness, as if she, too, would witness the dreadful scene at which Julie's quivering finger pointed. Andrea came softly to the other's side and threw her arms about her.

"Julie, why did you not tell me all this before, when I asked you a few days ago? I would have helped you bear it."

"No, dear, *not then*; *then* you were a child—you would not have understood. But knowledge has come to you, bitter knowledge. You are a woman now—a sufferer, and can understand."

Andrea pondered aloud: "Yes, but this is not so *very* hard. You can yet forgive him, if he loves you, and be happy; forget and be happy. *I—I* would do that."

Julie only smiled; she knew how unlike were their natures. Andrea was but the dimly comprehending child, who beat her tender, bleeding hands against the bars of outward circumstance—who wept and pleaded, as a baby might weep for a distant star.

Julie's fiercer battle lay in the uttermost depths of her own resolute, unforgiving soul, and tears were not hers for the weeping. And each woman, looking with such different eyes upon the other, thought how easy was the other's woe to bear.

Later in the night Andrea slept. Julie lay awake beside her, and pitied Andrea in her sleep.

There are two kinds of women, and they nurture two kinds of love. The one twines round and nestles in the strength of him to whom it clings. The other

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fastens upon, defends, and covers up his weakness. One, the instinct of the child; the other, that stronger, perhaps more madly passionate instinct of motherhood. The one takes all, the other gives all.

And this is why, perhaps, through the providence of God, the gentleman of noble purpose and high ideals, buffeting and struggling with the world, winning its plaudits and compelling its homage—why he should select for his soul's mate the woman who is forever a child, the butterfly girl, who smiles and weeps and cowers on his breast.

And this is why, perhaps, in Nature's sweet, eternal harmonies, the clear-browed, vast-hearted woman, within whose boundless soul a fleet of sorrows might find their anchorage—why this woman should select the weakling and the dissolute, to diadem his worthless life with unappreciated jewels. She must plan for him; she must plead with him; she must work for him; she must bear his children, she must bear his chiding, and she must love them both.

The deeper the depths to which he sinks, the deeper her devotion which follows him there. And through it all, and out of it all, and in it all, she finds her begrimed, her unacknowledged reward. It is the work, and not the wage, which satisfies her craving. It is the slavery's own dear self which glorifies the slave. The one is her husband's toy, to be laid aside in serious hours. The other is his citadel of refuge, his sanctuary of peace when the worries of the world beset him.

Yet men in crassest ignorance call these ill-assorted marriages.

Julie's was the love which gave.

If she had loved Andrea before, the child was doubly dear to her now, though by a strange inconsist-

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ency she immediately ceased to regard Andrea as a child.

Suffering in woman makes all old alike, and the last few days had completely filled the gap which years and experience placed between these two.

Before the altar of sorrow, as before the bar of God, all human souls bow their uncovered heads in a leveling equality.





IX

THE FIG-LEAVES

*Eve's daughters since,
With *deft finesse* and *smiling arts*,
To hide their thoughts and souls and hearts,
Excel her.*

AS his leave drew nearer and nearer to an end, Saint-Maurice grew more and more restless at his ignominious failure to wring any concession from Julie. Yet he could not put his finger upon a single instance where the girl had pointedly refused to talk with him. Only, there was always some one in the way.

The continued presence of the Duke added to his son's general sense of discomfort and restraint, for it kept constantly before him the knowledge that he must soon give a definite answer concerning the proposed d'Harlay marriage. Saint-Maurice well knew that his father considered this alliance as settled, for never in the history of their house had a son refused obedience in such a matter. And César even wondered what difference it could make, save the burial of a hope already sere and withered. But he could not quite consent to uproot the plant.

Very early on one of these mornings he nursed his

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helpless discontent upon a large divan half concealed in the great drawing-room. Quite unexpectedly, Julie and a maid came in to arrange some flowers. Saint-Maurice sat perfectly still and waited; his chance seemed to have sought him out.

"That is all, Fanchon," he heard Julie say, after a while. "I will finish it." And the maid left the room. The hour was early, the family had not yet risen, and no one else was near.

Saint-Maurice, without a word, rose and walked straight to the girl, placing himself between her and the door. She glanced up, and knew that she was hopelessly caught. Something in the man's determined air told her he could not be so easily evaded now, and her faint heart feared him.

Julie paused midway in the act of putting down a large bowl filled with flowers upon a slender, little, curved-leg table when he reached her side.

"Julie," he began, with an almost blunt directness—he knew that time was brief and opportunities rare—"Julie, you know how I have—" Then came the crash; table, bowl, and all tumbled to the floor together, and Julie's skirts were ruined with the water soaking down her dress.

"Oh, Fanchon! Fanchon!" she called, loudly; the maid reappeared, instantly, as Saint-Maurice thought.

"See—see," Julie laughed, holding up her draggled dress most ruefully; "see how you frightened me, coming so suddenly without warning. I've broken Uncle Antoine's prettiest bowl. Just look at the carpet, and my skirts are dripping wet."

"I'll run to fetch a mop, mademoiselle," suggested Fanchon, starting off again.

Saint-Maurice tried, awkwardly enough, to apologize for his intrusion, and as he stepped back out of the widening puddle of water Julie slipped past him to the door.

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"Excuse me a moment," she laughed, "I must run and get some dry clothes." She beat Fanchon through the door, leaving Saint-Maurice alone to glare at the broken bowl.

"The very devil seems to be against me," he muttered to himself. Then he walked out into the open air, where he could curse his luck more freely.

For many days Julie had constantly used every means to throw Malcolm into company with Andrea, half hoping that the attractive fellow might in some degree divert her mind from its morbid brooding. And then she came to realize that the brighter and lighter Andrea showed herself upon the terrace, the more wretched and pitiable she became in the seclusion of her own room. Julie often thought of the utterly unconscious cause, and wondered what there was in the man to work so much of misery to them both.

With the resolute woman in this humor, Saint-Maurice had found her reserve utterly unassailable. Even those superficial chats which were so tantalizingly indifferent, became less and less frequent. In fact, he might have given up and gone away, but for the knowledge that d'Aubigné lingered in the neighborhood.

The very night after Julie had so skilfully evaded him in the drawing-room, Saint-Maurice determined to bring the matter to a direct test. He sat at his table, trying to frame a note. But his idle pen halted, as an undirected horse might nibble at the road-side.

Here, beneath this same roof, rested the girl whom he had loved so long ago. Time and storm had only settled his heart more firmly upon her. He quivered as beneath the hissing of a lash at memory of the day when his boyish dread of ridicule had made a coward of him, and degraded him forever in her eyes.

Julie had steadfastly refused to see him while she was a homeless wanderer, and he, Saint-Maurice, was

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the Lord of Châteaunoir. Now their conditions seemed to be reversed. Her estates, which were considerable, would probably be regained through the powerful influence of Crozat. Saint-Maurice had nothing to offer her. True, he might one day be a duke, but dead men's shoes make poor wedding gifts for a man of proper pride. Then there was this wretched d'Harlay complication.

Saint-Maurice reasoned earnestly with himself, then wrote :

“ **MY DEAR MADEMOISELLE**,—For the first time in years we are again together. Believe me, during all this time you have been well remembered—remembered with a flush of shame, remembered in the bitterness of self-condemnation, but never forgotten.

“ It has seemed impossible for me to find an opportunity to speak with you since I came to this place, earnestly as I have sought for one.

“ If the passage of time has in some measure softened the repugnance with which you must regard me, I beg that you will allow me the grace to see you once—alone—before I leave Champfleur.

“ Will you permit this, that a soberer man may do what little yet remains to palliate the offences of a boy?

“ **CÉSAR DE SAINT-MAURICE.**”

Saint-Maurice choked down his pride as he wrote. He could not find it in his heart to resent her persistent repulse of his attempts at reconciliation. There had been a day when her girlish love had made of him a deity. He knew it; and he knew that he himself had trampled upon and desecrated the shrine.

His note reached Julie at a moment when she felt surest of herself in ministering consolation to Andrea. She recalled all the evil that she knew, all the evil that she had heard of him—trifler with innocence, duellist, broken-down gamester that he was, and, fearing lest

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she change her mind in weakness, Julie replied at once:

“ MY LORD SAINT-MAURICE,—The world is vast enough for all. It has held us both in peace. I see nothing but bitterness in uncovering the graves of my massacred and buried people. The old life for me is past. I prefer to forget it entirely in the new. JULIE DE SEVERAC.”

Julie wrote and despatched this note with feverish haste. When the messenger had gone, she stood beside her half-drawn curtains, looking out into the night. Resistance had become almost a religion with the woman, and she gloried in her strength. When the note had gone, Julie walked in and looked down upon Andrea. She was proud of what she had done—and yet—Then she returned to her own room and sat again at the window.

In the morning Saint-Maurice saw Julie, Andrea, Malcolm, and Gaston gathered on the terrace. He joined them, and spoke first to Andrea.

“ How are you this morning, dear?” he asked, laying a caressing hand upon her arm. The girl drew back imperceptibly, then replied:

“ Bright as the morning—who could be anything but happy on such a glorious day?”

Saint-Maurice was easily deceived, and glad her passing whim was gone.

“ Malcolm, this precious little witch has scarcely been on speaking terms with me for the longest week a poor wretch ever spent, and would not even tell me her grievance. What do you think of that?”

“ I should hate to fare so badly,” laughed Malcolm, and he looked as though he meant it. Besides, he did not half approve the very unconventional attitude of Saint-Maurice towards the girl.

While they all stood there chatting, Saint-Maurice’s

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attention was attracted to the road. A single horseman journeyed in the direction of Paris. The lone rider paused at the gate, as if undecided, then turned his horse up the long driveway to the château. It was d'Aubigné.

Saint-Maurice came closer beside Gaston. "Yonder comes d'Aubigné," he remarked. A quick glance of comprehension passed between Malcolm and Saint-Maurice; Saint-Maurice silenced him by a gesture.

"Who? D'Aubigné?" ejaculated Gaston. "Impossible! Yes, I do believe you are right."

Gaston turned immediately to the girls.

"Andrea, will you and Julie go into the house for a while?"

Andrea looked inquiringly at him, then he made no hesitation to explain:

"A man I do not care for you to know."

The girls understood, and sauntered quite carelessly towards the house.

"Who is that, Gaston?" asked Crozat, coming out upon the terrace.

"Count d'Aubigné, I think," Gaston replied. Crozat glanced doubtfully at Gaston, and, to make sure, inquired, "Your guest, my son?"

"No, Uncle Antoine. I saw him a few days ago in Paris, but did not ask him to come here. Maybe he's a friend of César's," and Gaston laughed.

By this time d'Aubigné had drawn near enough for them all to see the bland assurance with which he guided his horse aside from the road-way towards their little group.

"An unexpected guest, my lord," he said, in the gray cat's most purring manner. "I journey to Paris, and came in for an hour's rest." He spoke easily, and with the comfortable air of a man who feels sure of his ground, for his toughened sensibilities refused

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to detect any reluctance in the politely framed welcome of Crozat.

This fellow was no fool, but he could overlook many things which he plainly saw.

D'Aubigné was so dusty and weary looking that Gaston felt obliged to invite him to his quarters for a cleaning and a glass of wine.

Saint-Maurice lagged back with Malcolm, very uncertain and undecided.

"What shall we do?" asked Malcolm.

"I do not know," replied Saint-Maurice, "except that he must not be permitted to remain here." Saint-Maurice spoke in that quiet, determined fashion of his, which did not brook contradiction or admit the possibility of failure. "He said he was riding to Paris—came in here for an hour's rest. I mean to see that he stays no longer."

"But it will make a pretty row if Crozat sends the fellow away," suggested Malcolm, discreet for once.

"Crozat need know nothing about it. You see to it that my horse is saddled at once. Call Gaston off and explain to him, then leave me alone with d'Aubigné."

"Do you mean to ride with him?"

"Yes. He said he was going to Paris. So am I. And I will see that he goes all the way."

In a very few moments the two men had arranged their plan to be quit of d'Aubigné. They started together for Gaston's room, and met d'Aubigné with Gaston, leaving it.

"Gaston," began Saint-Maurice, "Mademoiselle Crozat desires to see you. I will play host to Monsieur d'Aubigné until you can return."

Malcolm walked away with Gaston, while Saint-Maurice nonchalantly linked his arm into d'Aubigné's.

"Quite a happy accident to see you again, d'Aubigné. Come, we will take a stroll about the grounds; they

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are very beautiful at this season." The suggestion suited d'Aubigné, and they went.

Passing through the hall-way, chatting easily, both men caught a glimpse of Julie and Andrea coming towards them. But the girls turned sharply aside and vanished into the drawing-room, not, however, until Saint-Maurice had noted the plain disgust on Julie's face.

"Egad! there is beauty for you," remarked d'Aubigné, with insolent admiration; "the dark and the fair, an artistic symphony in light and shadow—too pretty to be so chary of their charms," he continued, trying to glance into the door as they passed. Saint-Maurice could have strangled the fellow, but he only hurried him the faster from the house.

Once outside, Saint-Maurice pulled him on towards a little arbor where they could be quite alone. D'Aubigné's eyes roamed about him inquisitively. The other man had a fixed destination, and there they promptly landed. There were benches in the arbor, and a rough table.

"Pray be seated, d'Aubigné; I want to talk with you," and then d'Aubigné began to realize that perhaps there was something behind Saint-Maurice's hospitality.

Julie and Andrea watched them disappear together. Andrea had all of a girl's curiosity about the forbidden, so she asked questions concerning this Count d'Aubigné, and Julie, who knew his blackguard reputation, did not brighten it any in her telling.

"Now, d'Aubigné," Saint-Maurice commenced at once, "tell me where you've been."

D'Aubigné looked at his questioner, then evaded his eye, and wondered how far to take him seriously. "Oh, nowhere in particular. I've had a trifling little adventure in the neighborhood of Dyon, and am re-

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turning to Paris. Just my idle brain, you know, Saint-Maurice, for I've nothing to keep me out of mischief. I might be persuaded to remain here a day or two, as you seem to have so agreeable a party—”

Saint-Maurice leaned across the table towards him and said, coolly, “I hear your wife is ill, and—”

D'Aubigné looked with quick suspicion at him, and Saint-Maurice continued:

“I hear, also, that you have fast horses prepared to make a journey by night to Paris—”

D'Aubigné controlled himself and smiled—the smile of the fox in a trap. He started to speak, but Saint-Maurice stopped him.

“You said as you came in that you were riding to Paris. So am I. You leave in an hour. So do I.” Saint-Maurice leaned close to him and looked him straight in the eye; d'Aubigné's glance wavered. “We will ride together *all the way*? Is it agreed, d'Aubigné?”

“But, my dear fellow—” he expostulated.

Saint-Maurice stopped him short. “I brought you here where we would not be interrupted; now let us understand each other.” The man had a very determined way when he was roused. “I suspect your errand at Champfleur. These people here suspect it. They are on watch for you. So you and I will ride to Paris. Is it agreed?”

D'Aubigné had slowly lost his effrontery, and now he only made a pretence of keeping up the swagger. But he bravely toed the mark and said, “By Heavens! Saint-Maurice, you must have eaten yourself a nightmare; what ails you? You talk like an addled man. I am almost afraid to ride in your company. I journey to Paris—yes; so do you. We go together; good—but, by the miracles of Mahomet! you have some queer

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notions in your head." The fellow was too shrewd to own himself caught.

"D'Aubigné," Saint-Maurice said, in dangerously quiet tones, "if it were not for my friend's roof I would tell you simply that you lie. You *are* lying; you know it, I know it, but I say nothing of it here. You understand me perfectly." D'Aubigné betrayed not the slightest resentment as Saint-Maurice continued: "So the very easiest way is for you to pursue your journey in an hour, as you said. This will avoid all friction."

D'Aubigné sat very quiet for a while, then he laughed.

"Well, have your way; we ride together. You always were a stubborn fellow."

"And you were ever sensible," Saint-Maurice returned; "come." Then, casually as they came, they returned to Gaston's room.

"I wonder why César should stay there so long and talk with such a man?" Andrea inquired of Julie, as the two men straggled up the walk together. Julie only shook her head.

In Gaston's room d'Aubigné sat at the table fingering his emptied glass when Gaston entered.

"Sorry, César, that you are obliged to go," he remarked, "but the groom is making your horse ready. It's lucky that you and d'Aubigné will both have such good company for the road."

"Yes, very fortunate," d'Aubigné assented, dryly.

Saint-Maurice rose to leave. "Gaston, will you do the honors to Count d'Aubigné while I bid the family farewell?"

Outside the door he met Malcolm, who asked: "Are you really going, César? And d'Aubigné?" but Malcolm knew full well that Saint-Maurice would force the fellow away.

"Yes, I want him out of the neighborhood; per-

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haps you had better warn Crozat and Gaston when I am gone."

Malcolm hesitated, then turned and followed Saint-Maurice to assist in making him ready. There was something on Malcolm's mind, and the impulsive fellow rarely brooded long over anything he intended to do.

He seized a moment during Saint-Maurice's preparation, and drew him aside from the men who were packing his baggage, laid a hand upon his shoulder, and began, confusedly:

"César."

Saint-Maurice looked astonished at these unusual preliminaries.

"Well, what is it?"

"We have always been good comrades?"

"Yes, Malcolm; what are you coming at? Be quick—I'm in a hurry."

"I want to tell you of something," Malcolm said, briefly. "You may refuse to answer me, yet I feel I must ask. I love Andrea, and want to know if we are to be rivals. You brought me here, and I feel that I cannot remain behind you under false pretences. I thought—" But there was no need to finish the sentence; both men understood.

"No, Malcolm," Saint-Maurice answered, "not rivals. I love Andrea very dearly, of course—who could help it?—but not as you think. My old friend"—he took Malcolm's hand in sincere grasp—"hard as it would be for me to know that she cherishes a love nearer than my own, yet I wish you all good fortune."

"The fact is, Malcolm," Saint-Maurice continued, and dropped into a chair as he spoke, with the faintest suggestion of resignation in his attitude—"the fact is, articles have already been drawn up for my marriage with a daughter of the Prince d'Harlay." Which

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daughter this was, what she was like, or her personal characteristics, Saint-Maurice did not deem it interesting to mention or Malcolm to inquire of. She must be a suitable person, or his father would not have made the contract.

"It is a brilliant alliance; I congratulate you," Malcolm said, formally enough, and Saint-Maurice returned to his packing.

His scanty preparations were soon complete; now it only remained for him to make what lame excuses he could to the family for his sudden departure. Saint-Maurice stood for some moments thoughtfully in his door, then came slowly through the hall. A cross passage led off by the right hand towards the girl's apartments. He had not been in that part of the house since Andrea's unaccountable whim. Now he paused at the corner of the passage and glanced in that direction. Malcolm had joined Andrea, and they were just going together out of the far door. Perhaps, Saint-Maurice thought, Julie might be left alone in the little writing-room which the two girls used. He would find out. Then he hastily resolved he would see her, with or without permission, if it were possible.

Quietly as he could, he walked towards the little writing-room; the door stood open; he looked in. Fortune favored him for once; Julie sat at her *escritoire*, quite alone.

Saint-Maurice walked in and stood beside her before she could rise.

"How dare you," she demanded, indignantly, "intrude upon me here when you know yourself to be unwelcome?"

"Yes, I know it, Julie," he answered, regretfully, "but I cannot bear to go without a word from you."

"Go?" she echoed, glancing at his travelling dress, then stifling the interest in her tones.

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"Yes, I am going to Paris; thence to the army. We look for an early campaign." The girl was silent. Saint-Maurice spoke again.

"Julie, you have denied me in every possible way, yet I feel I must have a moment all my own with you before I go. Julie, Julie, listen to me—I want to tell you—there is only an instant of time for—"

"Your good friend, Count d'Aubigné, grows impatient?" Julie flung the suggestion at him, making her tones the more scornful in order to hide their almost perceptible indecision.

Saint-Maurice stepped back, and looked full into her face, flushed as it was with the contempt she strove to heap upon him.

"My—friend?" he repeated.

"Yes," she persisted; "you have a congenial comrade for—"

The man opened his lips to silence her with the truth, but he knew how bitterly such a revelation would humiliate the woman, so he stilled the words for very manhood's sake. Yet, for the anger of it, he could not stand and talk with her in this humor. There was nothing further to say except—

"Julie, will you not bid me good-bye in kindness? I—"

"I know of nothing, monsieur, I can do more gladly; good-bye, good-bye—" she spoke at random, hurriedly. "The noble Count d'Aubigné is waiting—good-bye." She waxed nervous, and scarcely knew what words came from her tongue.

Saint-Maurice changed countenance and purpose. His face became as hard and set as hers, for the man, in his own way, was quite as stubborn.

"Then let it be good-bye, mademoiselle," and he left her abruptly.

Saint-Maurice and d'Aubigné took their stirrup-cups

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in front of the château, and rode away together. Malcolm sat with Gaston on the steps, laughing at the speed they had given to their parting guest.

The ladies had bidden César good-bye within doors, and d'Aubigné did not see them.

Soon as Saint-Maurice left her, Julie ran to one of the windows overlooking the court-yard—the same at which, with Crozat, she had watched him come. From there she observed the departure, and his hearty good-fellowship with d'Aubigné, they riding so jovially down the winding avenue. It was the delicious humor of this very situation at which Malcolm and Gaston laughed so loudly.

“A pretty pair,” Julie muttered to herself from the window—“birds of a feather.” And she thanked her own stanch resolution that she had so steadfastly maintained her self-respecting attitude towards him. And yet, with all of this, she pressed her face hard against the pane and kept her eyes upon him until horse and man dropped down behind a distant crest.

Then Andrea came dejectedly into the room.

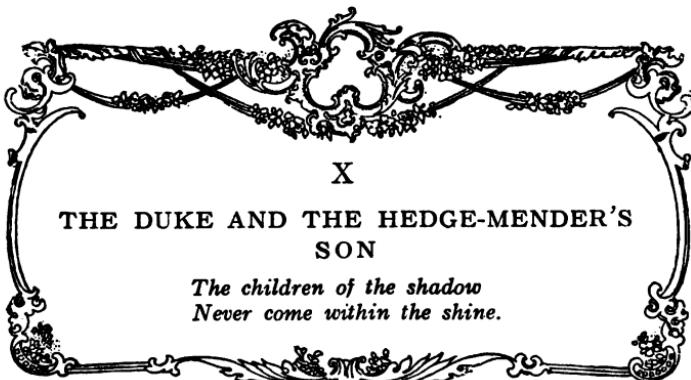
“Julie, I have been looking for you everywhere—everywhere. He is gone.” And the girl looked as though her very life had gone out with him.

Julie turned, and, with the first impulse of her own loneliness, she caught the younger girl close to her bosom.

“Why, Julie, what is the trouble? You are crying?” Andrea asked, looking up into her face.

“Nothing, dear, only it worries me to see you so terribly distressed.”





X

THE DUKE AND THE HEDGE-MENDER'S
SON

*The children of the shadow
Never come within the shine.*

THE hot-headed Count of Lautrec dragged no laggard foot in any love affair—he had already been slower in this than most. Now he scarcely let the sun go down upon his resolution.

Andrea had distinctly encouraged him of late, and favored him even above Saint-Maurice; this he was quick to see and to build his hopes upon. As a matter of fact, the girl had used him as a refuge, a sort of shield against Saint-Maurice. But as Saint-Maurice never guessed Andrea's heart, neither did she once suspect what lay in Malcolm's.

Early this tranquil evening Andrea sat, listening to Malcolm, thinking of the other man. Malcolm talked on easily, and something in his tones brought back to Andrea the fleeting sweetness of her afternoons with César. She settled back more dreamily in the chair and gave herself up to the dear reflections. Her lips half parted in a smile, and Malcolm, poor love-deluded lad, thought the smile was his,

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He reached forward impulsively across the arm of her chair. The hand that stretched out to hers trembled and grew cold, as it had never done in the day of battle. For Malcolm feared, and 'twas not the conscience of him which made the coward.

And then, with the swift rush of a charge, before the girl, dazed and heedless of him, could comprehend, he told her in abrupt words the fiery hopes of his heart; honest, manly, straightforward words they were, which no woman could trifle with or doubt.

Andrea shrank back bewildered, grieved beyond expression. She vainly strove to stay the rushing torrent of his speech, putting up her hands as if to ward off some physical blow.

The distress in her tone, too real for suspicion of coquetry, gave him her answer long before the meaning of her incoherent words became clear.

"Stop! stop! Oh, I pray you, my lord, pity me!"

"Pity you?" he repeated, wonderingly.

"Oh! Lautrec, Lautrec, I never dreamed—I would never have allowed you to go so far."

"So, Andrea, does it displease you that I should love you? Is it nothing to you that I should worship you, should give you—"

"I beg you—implore you to stop! It is not that—not that. Any woman would be honored by your love; any good woman would grieve to cause you suffering. I beg you not to torture me; I cannot, cannot listen."

"Cannot listen?"

"No, no; I cannot listen; I have no love to give."

"No—love—to—give?" The words came slow and far apart, as one condemned might ask the hour of his execution. "Is there, then, one whom you do—love?"

No thought of evasion entered her mind; she answered him, simply:

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"Yes."

The helpless man stared at her with great, unbelieving eyes; but well he knew that this was final, for hers was no coquettish half-denial which lures men on to greater follies. Neither was this "No" given in a tone which suggests that the same lips may perchance say "Yes" to-morrow.

Hours and hours of silence, as it seemed to Malcolm, passed before he comprehended that the girl was pleading with him to leave her. And he went. He scarcely paused until his horse could be saddled; then he rode away.

Perhaps an hour later, Crozat and Julie strolled about the grounds looking for Andrea; they called; she did not reply. Then they found the girl, still sitting as Malcolm left her, gazing fixedly into the distance.

Andrea labored under a terrible strain; it began to tell seriously upon her, and Crozat became genuinely alarmed at his daughter's haggard appearance. She had lost her rich coloring, and much of her form's rare symmetry. He questioned her gently and persistently, but got nothing more definite than, "Oh, you tender old goose of a father, I am perfectly well." Crozat shook his head and knew better. He noted the anxiety in Julie's face, and knew that something had gone amiss.

Julie whispered to him as the two separated at Andrea's door. "Wait in your study for me; I have something important to tell you." She nodded towards Andrea—it was concerning her.

"Well, what is it, Julie?" demanded Crozat, almost before the girl had opened his door; "how is Andrea?"

"She sleeps at last."

"Thank God!" murmured Crozat. "What is it you

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want to tell me? Be quick, if it is of Andrea; if not, the matter can wait."

Then Julie sat down close beside him and told him the whole truth from beginning to end. What effort this cost her, only the woman knew.

It staggered Crozat that such a thing should happen directly under his eye and he not suspect his daughter of being so desperately in earnest.

"And does César—does César love her?" Crozat questioned, hesitatingly. Again Julie's insurgent joy bounded uppermost, triumphant, jubilant, as she replied:

"No, Uncle Antoine, no; not as men love; not as Andrea loves him—not as Andrea loves him *now*."

After a long, long while Julie continued, very seriously, for if she could not feel loyally towards Andrea's love, she could at least act a loyal part:

"Uncle Antoine, I do not wish to alarm you, but something must be done with Andrea; she does not sleep; she eats nothing; she has a fever now, and I am desperately afraid for her. She is not the kind of woman who can bear up against a great disappointment which is also a bitter humiliation." Julie well knew how much of courage it required to toil along beneath such a burden. Crozat still stared at her and said nothing. He had quite forgotten Julie, as he forgot all else.

And Julie left him sitting there, seeking to devise a way by which he could give his daughter the only thing it had ever been beyond his power to give to her at once.

Antoine Crozat, owner of a hundred ships and a dozen fine estates, master of millions, paced up and down the narrow room. To this reputed miser, his castles, treasures, ships, and proud possessions were but as paltry baubles when weighed in the balance beside the one creature whom he loved—Andrea.

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It was the custom of Crozat to act promptly. That vigorous mind never spent its energy in repining.

The step he was about to take was, after all, but a premature ripening of the old and well-considered purpose.

The night was not so far advanced but that he might yet find the Duke in the little study allotted to him at Champfleur. So Crozat lost no time; his resolution, quickly taken, was to be as quickly put to the test. To his great gratification that hearty voice, familiar for fifty years of close association, responded to his knock.

"Oh, it's you, Antoine; come right in. It's about time I was laying aside these accounts, anyway, and I will make you an excuse to quit work. There's just a trifle here to finish—a department report. I thought I would bring them with me for examination at leisure. Go on and talk; I can listen, too. You and I have not had a good, long talk for months."

He passed an arm about the shoulders of his foster-brother, with as much of a caress as strong men give. Surely his mood was propitious for Crozat's errand. All the while the Duke was bundling his papers into neat packages, arranging his table for the night. Then he wheeled about with:

"How is Andrea to-night? Was she not ill this afternoon?"

"Yes, but she is asleep now." Antoine was planning how he should open his business, and incidentally thinking it very odd that he should consider the method of his dealings with Hector. Hector gave him ample time, for he was in a talkative mood—rare now. The Duke continued: "I have been thinking a great deal what we should do with Andrea. It is a pity you have given the child everything, leaving nothing for me to give, when I love her quite as dearly."

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Antoine was accustomed to this manner, for Hector and the Duchess assumed a proprietary interest in his motherless child.

"She and Julie are to be with us in the city this winter. No, you need not shake your head—that is all arranged. The change will do Andrea good. They must help us prepare for César's marriage during the Christmas holidays."

Antoine flinched at the decided way in which the Duke referred to this alliance as an accomplished fact.

"You have never told me much about César's marriage," Crozat said; "has everything been settled?"

"Practically; there are some minor details of the settlement yet remaining open." And Crozat encouraged the Duke to speak at length of these. "I had three propositions, but this was the best, taken all in all."

When the Duke had finished giving the business details of his three propositions, Crozat shifted about uneasily in his chair, and inquired:

"What do the young people think of it?"

"I do not know," the Duke replied. "César, as you saw, raised no particular objection; he only asks for time. I do not believe he desires to marry just yet. That is exactly why I wish to see him well settled." A gleam of amused recollection came into the old man's eye. "I was precisely so at his age. Responsibilities steady a young blade wonderfully."

Antoine asked again, rather absently, "Does César love Mademoiselle d'Harlay?"

The Duke laughed. "Never thought of that; I am too busy a man to keep up with César's love affairs."

Antoine had been merely waiting for an opening. He now began in that simple, straightforward way which had always characterized his dealings with the Duke:

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"Hector, I am here to-night upon an important mission. Nothing in your life or mine was ever so vital to me as this, though—I only knew of it an hour ago."

The Duke, seeing the deep earnestness of Crozat, abandoned his own rather careless air, and drew closer to his foster-brother.

"Have you noted any change in Andrea of late?" Crozat inquired.

"Yes. I do not want to worry you needlessly, but her condition has given Margaret and myself great concern. We have talked about it many times since we came."

"Well, do you know the reason of it?"

"No. Has her physician discovered what the ailment is?"

"It is not for the physician. Julie told me, and Julie has known all the while. I might as well tell you at once and discuss it afterwards. There has never been any concealment or evasion between us; let us not have it now. Andrea loves César, and cannot bear the thought of his marriage—"

"Loves César? Impossible, Antoine—*impossible!* Why, the foolish children. No, no, that is impossible; they are as of one blood—"

"So I felt, but Julie tells me it is true—that it preys upon her mind, and—"

"Nonsense, I cannot believe it. Why, Antoine, they were as frank and unconstrained as two children."

"Yes, so they were, until Andrea came to realize the truth; then she held herself aloof from him, and—"

"And what of César? Does he love her? Has he done—"

Antoine raised his hand to stop the father's question.

"No, Hector, do not blame César. Julie tells me he has never suspected aught but what has always been—and, in fact, seeing a difference in Andrea, thought

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he had unwittingly, or by some prank, offended her. He left here believing that to be so."

"Tush, Antoine; this is the whim of a child, and a few weeks at most will cure her of it."

Crozat shook his head sadly. "I fear it lieth deeper than we deem; and it is just such sunny maids as she who nurse in secret the sorrow which destroys."

"No, Antoine, let us hope a winter in Paris will bring the bloom to her cheeks again. She is far too young to set her heart with any great seriousness upon anything. It is the nature of young demoiselles to change."

Again Antoine shook his head.

"Not so with Andrea; she is far too like her mother." Antoine now struck directly at the pith of the proposition. "Hector, I have come here this night to you, as the father of César, to see if we cannot agree upon a match between our children—"

The sentence remained unfinished. If Antoine Crozat, son of the hedge-mender, had struck the proud Duke of Vernais, last of a thousand years of hereditary feudal lords, full in the face, he could not have been more astounded. If Antoine, the more than brother to Hector, had wilfully harmed him, betrayed his confidence, or proven recreant to honor, Hector could not have been more sincerely distressed in soul. The two men stood facing each other.

For a long time the Duke looked his foster-brother regretfully in the face; then his eyes dropped to the papers on the table and no words came to tell the tenor of his thought.

Several times he opened his lips to speak. Then, very slowly:

"Do you mean, Crozat, to propose that César, my heir, should marry Andrea?" he asked, as if hoping he had misunderstood.

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His very use of the word "Crozat" marked the distance which had suddenly come between them.

"Yes, Hector," answered Crozat, "that is precisely what I do mean. Like yourself, the idea never could have occurred to me but for Andrea's sudden—" Somewhat, Antoine spoke without confidence—spoke as if his words were thrown away

Hector fingered the half-consummated contract with the Prince d'Harlay.

"But what of this—the contract with d'Harlay?" he asked, seeking the first plausible obstacle which presented itself.

"D'Harlay will release you."

"Why? Do you know anything of it? Have you seen him?"

"No, but I know d'Harlay. What is the amount of his daughter's dowry?"

"Some five hundred thousand."

"Well, I will double it for her, and she can easily find another husband to her liking."

And the Duke of Vernais admitted to himself that Crozat was right, for he, too, knew the d'Harlay weakness.

The Duke left his chair, strode back and forth across the room, and paused several times in front of Crozat without making further reply. Then they stood directly face to face, his hands outspread with almost a gesture of supplication.

"Antoine, we have been dearer to each other than any brothers ever were, for over fifty years. I pray God our love may be strong enough to outlive this test, whatever it may be. You have spoken to me frankly, and I will answer you in the same spirit. Earnestly as I regret it, it grieves me to the soul to tell you, but what you propose is impossible—*impossible.*"

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

Crozat, disappointed but undaunted, replied vigorously, as a man of business:

“Mademoiselle d’Harlay brings a dowry of five hundred thousand; Andrea will bring ten, yea, twenty-five times as much, for Antoine Crozat is far richer than even his enemies and the rabble charge him—”

“Antoine, Antoine, it is not that; it is no matter of money that stands between us; my people are not a mercenary race.”

“Is Mademoiselle d’Harlay more lovely than Andrea—is she more—”

“No, no, Antoine, there is no woman in France more lovely in person and in soul than Andrea; none more pure, none in whom all the graces of womanhood more nearly reach perfection. Must I tell you this now, after all the love and all the pride I have felt in Andrea since her birth? You are not prouder of her, more ambitious for her, than I.”

Crozat still sat dumb while the other spoke so painfully; there was no mistaking the intense suffering in the Duke’s voice, the unwavering resolution.

“Why, Antoine, Providence gave me no daughter, and it has been the purest delight of my life to watch that child of yours growing up about me, to feel her love almost as great for me as it is for you.”

“Now, Hector,” broke in Antoine, his voice thick and husky, “heed *me* for a moment. That daughter whom you love and praise—God bless her!—loves your son. If César loves any woman in the world, he loves my Andrea. She will make him happy, and find her own happiness in thinking of his. I realize full well that marriage is oftener than not a mere business arrangement—like the one you now have in hand—and I am fully prepared on that score. My daughter’s happiness, perhaps her life, hangs in the balance, and I do not hesitate to speak my whole mind to Hector.”

DUKE AND HEDGE-MENDER'S SON

"And I wish to Heaven, Antoine," replied the Duke, "you had only Hector to deal with!" The Duke turned his face away that he might not see the anguish he caused, and nerved his own heart to meet a grievous trial. "But," he continued, with an effort, "this is a proposition from the *Marquis du Chatel* to the *Duke of Vernais*, and contemplates an alliance between the two noble houses they represent—nothing more, nothing less." The voice was hard and cold and determined.

"Antoine," he continued, "from my very birth you have known my soul as no other man or woman knew it. As God and you are my judges, you know how lightly I hold, for myself, the shallow distinctions of rank and wealth. However that may be, as the head of the house of Vernais I can never forget that I, personally, am merely the connecting link between the past and the future, between ten centuries that are gone and unnumbered years which are yet to come. In my own poor self I only see the binding tie, only feel the responsibility of living in accordance with the traditions of my race, and handing down those heirlooms unbroken to others of the name who are to follow me. The individual is nothing, the hereditary principle is everything."

"Hector, Hector!" Crozat appealed to him; "Andrea would make to César a loyal and devoted wife. She would love him, tend him, and soften every adversity as no other woman would." For the first time their eyes met, each full of sorrow. The Duke answered:

"Ay, and make of him a happier, a better man. That I do not doubt." There was no tinge of haughtiness in his tone, rather real humility in sorrow as he continued: "But our race is not born to be happy as simple folk are happy, in their families, their home-life, their prattling children. Rank imposes upon us

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

the obligation to command men, to be great, to bear the burdens of the great, at whatever cost—at whatever cost."

Perhaps the Duke's mind wandered back to his own hot youth when, but for an iron-willed, imperious father, he, too, would have thrown the pride of birth aside to wed a simpler maiden than was acceptable to the princely patricians of Vernais.

Could one have read the inner thoughts of each, 'twere hard, indeed, to tell which suffered the more of torment. Perhaps it was the Duke, for to him the thought of giving pain to Crozat—or, worse, to Andrea—was wellnigh insupportable. Not once could he waver; he could give no doubtful or evasive answer which left the question open to future discussion. So he kept nothing back, for very kindness' sake.

"Crozat, I beg of you not to misunderstand me, but in this the personal feelings of Hector or of César are not given a feather's weight. The heirs of the house must wed for its glory, for the upbuilding of its power. It has been a matter of pride to us for centuries that from our stock came many of the great marshals, ministers, even kings, for our blood antedates the Bourbon, is more ancient than the Valois. Charlemagne came from us, as did Barbarossa. Do not think on that account we hold ourselves better than you or yours; that is not the spirit. But such a history brings with it its sorrows as well as its glories. My father's marriage united with us the great house of Champmanoir, mine brought an alliance with the dukes of Vieux-Marche; and in César, the arms of d'Harlay will be quartered with our own."

Antoine heard him through with bowed head and rebellious spirit. His words were true, his patrician logic was irrefutable. Yet there was bitterness in Crozat's soul that the phantom of a feudal bondage

DUKE AND HEDGE-MENDER'S SON

should arise, intangible and unconquerable, to stand between him and a holy wish far dearer than his life. The substance had crushed Crozat's fathers for countless generations, the shadow was to crush the son.

Crozat now appealed to him again, earnestly, eloquently.

“Is not the trade of a merchant honorable? Were not the princes of Tyre merchants? Did not the galleys of Hiram, with their sails of royal purple, penetrate the remotest corners of the earth, and bring their rich stuffs to us barbarians of the west? Did they not carry in return the ivory of Africa, the gold of Ophir, and hordes of slaves to cast at the feet of their king? Did not the caravans of Solomon, the Wise, the Great, scour the deserts in the paths of trade? Did not Giovanni, the Medici merchant, found a dynasty? Did not Lorenzo win world-wide fame as the Magnificent? Did they not seat bearers of their name in the chair of St. Peter's, and on the proudest thrones of Christendom? Do not our own kings glory in their blood and fame? Did they not come to be ranked above the greatest princes — more powerful, more magnificent, more wise?”

“Yes, that is all true,” agreed Hector, “but before that, at the beginning of their fortunes, no petty feudal prince of Lombardy, of Florence, or of Ravenna would have wedded with a daughter of Giovanni. Let me be frank, Crozat. While your own success has been marvellous, while you are, perhaps, the richest man in France except the King, a noble, still you are not the ruler of a province, not a sovereign prince. If you were a Medici, if you could dower your daughter with a princely name and rank, then, perhaps, the matter might be favorably considered.”

In the long silence which followed, Antoine's mind

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was already aflame with a thought which the Duke's words suggested.

"Antoine, you can have no idea how this tortures me; but this arrangement with d'Harlay must be carried out."

The two men left the room together; once outside, the Duke put his arm lovingly round Crozat, and, walking slowly through the passage, said:

"God save you, Antoine, from as hard a task as that you set before me this night."

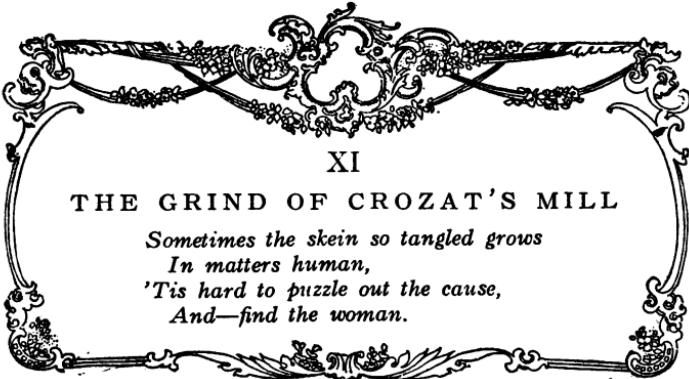
When Antoine Crozat found himself alone with his distress, he gave way somewhat to the wretchedness of a father's heart. Over and over again he pondered the words of the Duke. There was but one sentence which held out the elusive glimmer of a hope, and that glimmer was persistently fastened upon, nursed close, and returned to:

"If you were a Medici; if you could dower your daughter with a princely name and rank," Hector had said, and Crozat repeated it over and over to himself. Greater things than this had been accomplished by ambitious men. By the grace of God he would do it.

"But," he reflected, helplessly, "all of this takes time—time; this marriage is only a few months away." He thought a while. "Yes, yes, I must prevent that first, then trust to God and my own good management to bring the rest about."

And when the servant knocked upon his door at morning, Crozat still sat beside his table, planning, contriving, devising.





XI

THE GRIND OF CROZAT'S MILL

*Sometimes the skein so tangled grows
In matters human,
'Tis hard to puzzle out the cause,
And—find the woman.*

CROZAT'S first thought had been that he might, for Andrea's sake, find a dynasty in some one of the smaller principalities nominally subject to the crown of France. Their rulers were constantly embroiled in strife with Louis, and the shrewd old diplomat believed he could easily induce the King to grant him the sceptre of a deposed prince. For there were many restless underlings whom the King would be glad enough to supplant by a loyal and a powerful subject.

But Crozat came to dismiss this idea for a more splendid one.

The age of chivalric chimeras had not yet passed. The eyes of adventurous Europe had long been greedily fixed on the far province of Louisiana, inflamed by the fabulous stories of its richness. It was a land—as reports ran—where diamonds formed in the dew of the flower; where naked savages wore bands of

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

solid gold; where silver was so plentiful it had no value; where, by merely filtering the waters of the Hidden River, a yellow sediment of gold was gained—richer than Peru, more opulent than the storied East. It was the fairyland of the day, and small wonder that it suddenly appealed to Crozat as a country where he might find a principality under the sovereignty of his king.

Crozat's information was world-wide, his plannings girdled the earth, his vessels penetrated the remotest seas. He knew that Louisiana had become a troublesome possession to the King. The wars and distractions at home had prevented Louis from bestowing that care upon the infant colony which its urgent needs demanded. The King could neither maintain it with profit nor part from it with dignity. Even now Bienville, the governor, clamored for men, men, money, money, food, food—none of which could be supplied. Crozat systematically examined into the condition of the province. Then one day the kingdom was more amused than irritated at the folly and audacity of this *parvenu* marquis, who proposed to buy an empire of glorious promise. But their sneers changed to indignation, for, within a space of time marvellously short, news went abroad that the proposition to purchase Louisiana was accepted, and a measureless domain in the West passed under the sceptre of the house of Crozat.

And the King, delighted at being so richly rid of his unmanageable colony, intimated that he would create Crozat Prince of Louisiana, reserving to himself a perpetual royalty from its mines and treasures. Then Crozat began in earnest the mighty task which was to make Andrea the Princess of Louisiana, and raise her to a feudal equality with Hector's son.

The enormous undertaking went well on its way;

THE GRIND OF CROZAT'S MILL

Crozat revelled in the prodigious labor of organizing the motley force which now marched at his bidding.

But Saint-Maurice, the hinge and pivot of all this vast machinery—the purpose of it all—was never lost sight of. The hand of Crozat even now tightened upon him. This part of the project had cost the old man a world of patient thought, for it must be done to a nicety. He must not only prevent the d'Harlay marriage, but he must make any alliance whatever impossible. And this, too, must be so deftly accomplished that Crozat would never be suspected of having meddled with the matter. The hedge-mender's son had conducted intricate affairs before, so he managed this one well.

And he began this way:

That portion of the army to which Saint-Maurice had been assigned lay camped in the great forest of Ardennes, on the Netherlands frontier. One night, probably two weeks after Crozat despatched a governor of his own making—Lamothe Cadillac—to Louisiana, the old man alighted from his carriage at the Ardennes headquarters. His errand ostensibly had to do with the finances of the army.

Another carriage, travelling behind Crozat's, deposited three men and a woman at an isolated hut within the French lines. This woman was la Petite Nicolette, the clever little soubrette of the Comédie, who had all of Paris beneath her nimble feet.

These were the tools which Crozat intended to employ in the matter of preventing the marriage of Saint-Maurice. For the wily old man had decided that Saint-Maurice must leave France until his own plans had matured.

Crozat proceeded immediately to the tent of Colonel Lafresnie, who commanded César's regiment. The colonel expected him, and was alone. Crozat knew his

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

man; he knew the arguments which would win him; he had this logic with him, plenty of it, and he carried his point in the end. They had a long conference. When at last Crozat rose to go, Lafresnie finally assured him: "He will be stationed as you direct, my lord. After that, it will be very easy." Then Crozat counted out the gold—for such bargains are only made on the basis of sure money promptly in hand. Crozat waited around Villars's headquarters all of the next day, and it was not until some time after dark that he put his puppets to work.

When the dark had come, Captain Saint-Maurice sat near his watch-fire at the post which Crozat had indicated. Having completed his first round of the sentinels, César had time to rest beside his fire. Then Crozat's marionettes came and played their parts before him while the shrewd old showman pulled the strings.

First, Colonel Lafresnie rode up; Saint-Maurice rose and saluted.

"Captain," he inquired, "do you intend remaining here for as much as a half-hour?"

"Possibly longer than that, colonel."

"Then may I not borrow your picket there to send with a message to my tent?"

"With the greatest pleasure, colonel; I will watch his beat until he returns."

Colonel Lafresnie gave the sentinel a brief order and the man departed. Then the colonel remained for a moment chatting with Saint-Maurice before he rode on again.

Scarcely had Lafresnie disappeared when a child accosted Saint-Maurice from behind—accosted him timidly, in a thin, dispirited voice. He turned and looked down upon a very small, yellow-haired Ardennaise girl, a child who might have been quite pretty but for

THE GRIND OF CROZAT'S MILL

her scared expression and the pinching poverty of her attire. She spoke hurriedly and piteously in the tongue of the country, for Nicolette had gone to Paris from this very Ardennes forest.

"Oh, m'sieu, m'sieu, won't you let me go to my mother, my sick mother, down in that hut yonder? It is such a little way—just there;" she pointed towards a barren field beyond the hill. "My mother is ill, so very ill. Here is the medicine that is to make her well again." The child held up a phial, and spoke in a rush, as if dreading denial before she had finished. "I have walked all day for it, m'sieu, and I am so tired. The man down there would not let me pass, but m'sieu is good and kind."

Saint-Maurice looked kindly at the distressed child—for Nicolette was a consummate actress. He laid his hand upon her head, asked a few gentle questions. Her wide-open eyes told the pitiful story of poverty and weakness even more eloquently than her tongue. Saint-Maurice laughed sympathizingly. "You do not look so very dangerous, little one," he said, slipping a silver coin into her hand. He hesitated a moment, then turned his back and went to tighten his saddle-girth. When he took his place again the child had vanished through the lines. It all happened so very quickly, and he thought no more of it.

In a short time the sentry came back from his errand and picked up his musket again.

César resumed his seat at the fire, and with it his dreamy meditations upon Julie, the subject which always, in one guise or another, filled his hours of inaction.

Suddenly, enough to startle him, he heard a voice at his back say, "Here he is, my lord," and to his great astonishment Antoine Crozat greeted him cordially. Saint-Maurice sprang up.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"Hullo, Uncle Antoine, I am delighted to see you; didn't know you were within a hundred leagues."

"Yes, César, I had business at the front, and when it was finished I thought I'd come out and chat with you. Idle time hangs so heavy on my hands."

Saint-Maurice and Crozat sat and talked together for quite a while, half listening to a desultory firing towards their right, when two men came galloping down the lines. They checked their horses in front of the sentinel. Saint-Maurice turned his head from Crozat long enough to hear them question the man, asking if a woman had passed that way. The guard replied that he had seen none.

"Then keep a sharp lookout for her," one of them ordered in a louder tone; "she has tried to pass the lines at several places to-night. A very cunning spy, disguised as a small girl. Arrest her on sight." They spurred on to the next post, apparently not seeing Saint-Maurice.

It took some minutes for him to comprehend what had occurred. "A spy! — a spy!" The possibility dazed him; but the woman had gone, and it was too late to pursue her, even if she were a spy, which Saint-Maurice could not believe.

Crozat paused in what he had been saying, deliberately giving Saint-Maurice ample opportunity to listen and to reflect. When the horsemen were well out of hearing, he asked:

"What was that they said, César?"

"Something about a spy, I believe," César answered, absently.

"A girl, they said, did they not?" Crozat persisted.

"Yes, I think so." César's words came mechanically.

"I was unusually curious," the old man explained, "for I heard something concerning her at headquarters.

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Several searching parties have been sent out to look for the woman, and her capture is deemed of the utmost consequence. She is supposed to have important papers on her person."

Saint-Maurice was silent and thoughtful. "Then my duty is clear," he said, rising to his feet. "Uncle Antoine, I allowed just such a small girl as that to pass the lines—strictly against orders. She deceived me completely—"

"What!" ejaculated Crozat, acting his part quite as well as did Nicolette. A few rapid questions passed between them, until Saint-Maurice had told it all.

"Well, what do you think is your duty, my boy?" Crozat asked, with the most earnest interest.

"My duty is"— Saint-Maurice spoke very slowly, for the gravity of the situation began to dawn upon him—"my duty is to report it fully, at once, to my colonel."

"But," objected Crozat, "that may draw you into difficulties."

Saint-Maurice looked at him. "It is not to be considered," he replied. And the wily Crozat so framed his objections as to make more clear the necessity for just such a step.

"I am going," the young soldier decided. Then he and Crozat together took their way towards the colonel's tent, and neither of them spoke.

On the third night after this carefully concocted happening in the Ardennes forest a faint light might have been seen burning in an isolated room at Crozat's city mansion.

Saint-Maurice sat beside the table, his head bent forward. The man's tumbled hair and general manner betrayed the dejection of a serious trouble. Once in a while he rose, walked about, and sat down again.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

Every few moments he consulted his watch, and listened to some far-off noise of wheels in the street. His captain's uniform hung soiled and wrinkled about him, wholly lacking the neat appearance of a careful soldier. The bed seemed rolled upon and disarranged, as if some one had restlessly thrown himself many times across it, but not to sleep.

Saint-Maurice in Crozat's house, in the web of the spider!

Directly Crozat entered the room, travel-stained and muddy. He had remained behind César at the front.

Saint-Maurice sprang up and almost ran to Crozat, asking, "Well, could you do anything?"

"I did the best I could, César," he answered, sorrowfully, "though God knows that is bad enough. Too many people had heard of it already."

Saint-Maurice sank down into a chair opposite Crozat, and bowed his head upon the table. Then he looked up and asked, "What do they say?"

"Colonel Lafresnie simply says you allowed a dangerous spy to pass the lines when you had most stringent orders."

Saint-Maurice shuddered. "Uncle Antoine, she looked like a child not more than twelve years old, and she begged so piteously for me to let her go to her mother. She would have deceived anybody—but my orders were strict."

Crozat looked down at the despairing attitude of Saint-Maurice, and his face changed to an expression of intense pity and love. Once he almost stretched forth a hand to raise him up and comfort him. Then another and a far stronger impulse seemed to check him, for he took on again the cold, determined air of a man who has begun a certain line of action and means to follow it out at all hazards.

"It is for Andrea," he muttered. Then he said,

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aloud: "César, listen. There is something about this matter which I do not quite understand—"

"But, Uncle Antoine, I have told you all I know from one end to the other; it could be no worse than that. The thing really came about so quickly no one could have suspected a trick. But even then, my orders were positive, and I had no right to disobey them."

"Yes, yes," Crozat agreed, as if with deep regret, "and it sounds like a bad piece of business, I admit—in the face of the enemy, too. It is very fortunate I chanced to be there. If I only had a little time I might clear it up. Now I will tell you what you must do; it is all arranged. I have a vessel leaving for Louisiana the day after to-morrow. You must disappear for a time. I will provide you with a command in the colonies under another name; no one will ever know."

"But," Saint-Maurice objected, firmly, "that is running away, and I cannot do that. What would the army think—what would my father think?" And he stood, rigidly upright, looking down upon Crozat with such an air of resolution as startled the older man. "What would my father think?" César repeated.

"But, César, have you thought what will happen if you stay? You will be court-martialled *and shot*, or dismissed from the service in disgrace."

Saint-Maurice manned himself as if the fear of death had no place in his consideration. Then the staggering weight of the disgrace struck him down into his chair again.

"If we gain time, César, everything may come right. My people are doing all they can to trace it out. Meanwhile Colonel Lafresnie has agreed to report you as among the killed in a skirmish that night."

Saint-Maurice glanced up blankly as Crozat hurriedly outlined his plan, and pressed it upon him.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

When Crozat mentioned the colonel's name, Saint-Maurice whirled about, looking straight at him, and asked, "What does the colonel say?"

"He said that, for your father's sake, he would consent to report you as among the killed—it were a fitter end for the hero of Denain. I secured Lafresnie that assignment, and have helped him in other ways. Should you go back to the army in its present disorganized condition—well, you know what your colonel's duty would be, the penalty to himself if he disregarded it?"

Saint-Maurice nodded; he knew only too well.

"I thought, César," pursued Crozat, in his clear, convincing tones, "that the best way to *save your father's name* would be to have you quietly leave the country. When all turns out right, I will send for you, and we will explain it. Meanwhile your father and the world must believe you dead."

"I won't do it," replied Saint-Maurice, positively. "I will face it."

"But you cannot do that—your family name—"

"My poor mother!" groaned Saint-Maurice.

"Is that not better than for her to see you disgraced?"

"A thousand, thousand times," Saint-Maurice replied, earnestly; "but couldn't my father and mother be told?"

"Are *you* willing to tell them? You may go to them, if you prefer." Crozat suggested this slowly, to let the idea take firm hold. César did not fear his father, but Crozat was quite sure he would do anything rather than tell the Duke such a story.

"Are you willing to tell your father?" he repeated.

"No, my God!—no."

"Then, you see, you cannot remain in hiding for months here. There is action across the seas, and glory to be won. Meanwhile I will search France for something to put you right again."

THE GRIND OF CROZAT'S MILL

"But that is desertion, rank desertion," objected Saint-Maurice, as if that were the end of it. "You understand, I am absent for a week with my colonel's permission while this matter is being investigated—on condition that I see nobody but yourself. If I go away it will be desertion—and I prefer to return and be cashiered for disobedience of orders—"

"No, no," Crozat interrupted him; "I have provided against that." He took a document out of his pocket. "Here is the King's order, written in his own hand, transferring you from service at the front, and attaching you to my government of Louisiana, 'for certain secret purposes,' so it reads. You are to bear the name of Captain Ernest Crenan. This authorizes you perfectly. Only the King and myself know of it."

Saint-Maurice sprang to his feet again; he grasped Crozat's hand in both his own, but could not speak. Then he asked Crozat, earnestly: "Uncle Antoine, tell me—my head seems all in a whirl—do you think I should do this?" He looked straight into the old man's eyes.

"It is undoubtedly for the best—and perfectly honorable," Crozat assured him.

"Then I'll do it."

The whole thing was flimsy enough, but Saint-Maurice was in no frame of mind to be hypercritical. Like his father, he trusted implicitly to the fidelity and good judgment of Antoine Crozat.

When Crozat passed into his own study, he drew out a handkerchief to wipe his brow, though the night was far from warm. It had been a harrowing ordeal to him, the arranging of this trick which forced Saint-Maurice out of the country and made his marriage impossible. The lies he told César had almost choked him, but the young man's gratitude seemed harder still to bear.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

But, as Crozat justified himself, it was all for Andrea, and he could amply atone for César's present suffering by the great fortune and brilliant rank he would bestow upon his united children.

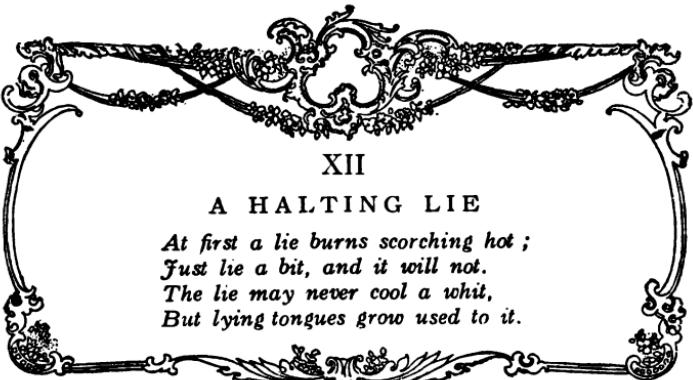
“It was necessary, necessary; time—time must be gained,” he kept repeating to himself. “And it can be but a short while,” he argued, for he had now brought himself to believe it only the matter of a few months before his empire-building scheme would succeed.

The very next night Saint-Maurice, now Captain Ernest Crenan, made a secret journey to Boulogne, and went aboard *Le Comte de Toulouse* immediately before that vessel sailed.

Saint-Maurice, relying absolutely upon the good offices of him who had been his ruin, turned his face towards the western wilderness with a more unquestioning faith than ever in his kind old Uncle Antoine

And the sting of it all lay in Julie.





XII

A HALTING LIE

*At first a lie burns scorching hot ;
Just lie a bit, and it will not.
The lie may never cool a whit,
But lying tongues grow used to it.*

CROZAT planned cunningly, but the best-built house may have a faulty stone to cause its fall. Colonel Lafresnie, in consideration of the neat sum of money paid in cash, reported Saint-Maurice among the killed in a little skirmish, and the Duke accepted it that his son had died upon the field. He instituted a rigorous search for César's body, but it could not be found.

Within a week there came a persistent rumor to Paris that Saint-Maurice was not dead, but had deserted under the most dishonorable circumstances. All of Paris heard it, and the rabble took great delight in adding to the tale.

This roused the Duke from his lethargy. He put his keenest secret agents upon the search. For weeks they burrowed like moles in the dark, then struck a trail which led them directly to *Le Comte de Toulouse*, Crozat's vessel. The Duke's strenuous efforts might

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now have uncovered the entire truth had he not gone trustingly to Crozat with what information he had gained. The Duke, with a perfect reliance, allowed Crozat to deceive him and throw him partly from the scent. Crozat grew nervous and uneasy, the searchers having come so desperately near finding out what had occurred in the Ardennes. Day by day he deceived Hector with false reports, and in these daily deceptions passed the next two weeks. But the imperious demands of Crozat's new empire in the West kept the old man from brooding over the treason to his foster-brother.

Other troubles now began to multiply upon Crozat. While he busied himself with the great affairs of Louisiana, and in carrying out his plan for the temporary banishment of Saint-Maurice, a tireless woman, who never forgot, was slowly preparing to enforce a demand upon him which could not be refused.

During the short space which intervened between that night when Saint-Maurice had allowed Nicolette to pass the lines, and his hurried departure, Crozat had been obliged to seek the assistance of Madame de Maintenon. It became essential for him to have the King's order releasing Saint-Maurice from service at the front, else the spirited fellow would never have gone to the colony. This coveted order Madame obtained, and in the King's own hand. And in so doing she acquired a weapon which Crozat could not fight against.

She had only to threaten him with the Duke of Verneuil to bring Crozat promptly to his knees. She kept her purpose carefully concealed until the time was ripe to spring her mine. Then Crozat received an urgent summons to attend Madame de Maintenon without delay.

He rode promptly to Versailles and went immediately

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to the room where Madame had appointed to meet him; an obscure room, in which the cautious woman could be safe from any interruption—even the King's.

“You are punctual, my lord,” Madame greeted him.

“When my Queen commands,” he replied, for Crozat knew just the keys to which her heart-strings were attuned.

“Tut, tut, Crozat, I am too old for pretty phrases. We will come at once to business. This young woman—de Severac—I wish her sent away. Two months ago you could not quite decide to let her go for a while on a visit. Do you know of any reason now why you should change your mind?” Soft and low as she spoke, her tones conveyed a powerful reason to the man. She leaned smilingly towards him, her eyes fixed pleasantly on his, a feminine incarnation of composure. Crozat thought quickly. He had favors yet to ask of his King beside which all the others were as nothing.

“We are now more necessary to each other, Crozat,” Madame continued, “and it is better that we should be friends. We may as well be perfectly plain. This girl annoys me, and I wish her out of the way. Your desire”—she paused, and her words came deliberately—“your desire, first, is to be made Prince of Louisiana.” Crozat came as near a start of surprise as it was possible for him to do. “And there is no reason why it should not be so. Indeed, I may say it shall be done. If I oppose it, you know full well you can never hope to win. All I ask of you in return is that this girl be sent away to America; you have a vessel, the *Baron de la Fosse*, sailing two weeks from to-day.” Crozat had not opened his lips, but the woman understood him well enough to know he would do as she demanded.

“Now, you wonder what you can tell the girl,” Madame continued, for she could almost read the man's thought; “you can tell her it will help you in your

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ambitions for your daughter;" Madame emphasized the "daughter," and Crozat started visibly this time. "It will secure a restoration of the de Severac estates, though I did not at first intend that this should be done. If these considerations do not appeal to the girl, you can frighten her by repeating the foolish gossip which has gained such credit in the city. Tell her that the King means to appoint her a lady-in-waiting to Madame de Soubise—perhaps worse."

Both Crozat and the woman knew how unfounded was this story, but it would serve their purpose well.

"When the King hears of it, Crozat, if he makes a noise, it can be given out so that it reaches him, that she ran away without your consent to join her old lover, the Count of Châteaunoir, at Massacre Island. When I helped you in this matter of spiriting away Saint-Maurice, I knew I would incur the implacable enmity of the young man's father if he ever discovered my connection with it. But I preferred to befriend you, Crozat; is that worth nothing? You remember how averse the King was to grant this favor, for he is fond of Vernais."

The woman had Crozat completely in her power; he knew it, she knew it. Before he left her, the bargain was made. France was too small for Julie; Switzerland, England, too near; she must go to America. Crozat strove in vain to persuade Madame that a nearer asylum would do quite as well. But the woman was obdurate, and Crozat knew he must submit.

"Now," Madame said, "we are entirely agreed?"

"Yes, Madame," he answered, "happily we are entirely agreed."

"I thought so," she smiled; "it is a real pleasure to have affairs with you; one does not need to explain, or storm—or threaten. You are so very clever, Crozat."

The old financier drove slowly homeward. This

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arrangement could not be helped; but it took him two full days to determine how he should break it to Julie.

Then there was another difficulty, even more serious. Julie might meet Saint-Maurice and bring about a premature revelation which could become exceedingly embarrassing. But Crozat could easily avoid this by sending a message to Saint-Maurice, warning him of Julie's coming, and urging that he go to some interior post.

Then Crozat thought suddenly, what had de Main-tenon meant by referring to Saint-Maurice as Julie's old lover. It must have been merely a blind to deceive those who would hear of her flight.

The death of Saint-Maurice would have completely crushed Julie but for the splendid generosity of her love which spent itself in striving to uphold Andrea. During the three long weeks which had elapsed since the calamity fell, the stronger woman had drowned her own dumb grief in tenderest consolations to the weaker.

"Oh, Julie, Julie!" Andrea often moaned upon her breast, "it seems you understand every thought of my heart." And indeed it was true, for Julie need only voice her own heart's utter desolation to pour the balm of subtlest sympathy into Andrea's. But Andrea's sorrow was more like a shallow pool which reflected every passing whim and cloud, while Julie's stormy wretchedness thundered itself away in the fathomless abysses of her own sternly guarded soul. No sound arose from the measureless caverns of her misery; even the froth-capped surf lavished its low complainings upon the sands of another woman's mourning.

In the solitude of many midnight vigils above Andrea's restless slumbers her great heart ofttimes had its way, and she wept herself to sleep as did the younger

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girl. Julie's was not the soul which wailed its trivial troubles from the house-tops, or craved a grudging sympathy from heedless Levites who passed by on every side. Her long, nervous strain had left the girl in a relaxed and quiescent mood, dumbly indifferent, except for Andrea.

And Crozat, who looked only upon his daughter, thought nothing of Julie. Yet there was something in the sanctity of her suffering which stilled his tongue whenever he thought to tell her of what had been arranged between himself and de Maintenon. Twice had he brought Julie to his study, and twice her calm, direct gaze had daunted even the resolution of Antoine Crozat. The third time he nerved himself to the uttermost, and sent again.

Julie came quietly into his study, thinking his uneasiness due to anxiety for Andrea. Crozat looked at her, and for the moment lost his courage again. But the thing must be done, and he might as well have done with it.

"How is Andrea, Julie?" the father inquired.

"She grows quieter, Uncle Antoine, though she has the same spells of weeping. Thank God, she can weep and wear away her grief. It is better for her wound to bleed at the lips than from the heart."

There was a pathos in this, coming from Julie, for her steadfast resolution denied itself the cleansing luxury of tears.

"My dear," Crozat said, coming over to her, "I have something very important, and very disagreeable for you." The girl looked up at him; there were few things which mattered to her now.

"You must say nothing of this to Andrea."

Julie promised, listlessly.

"I fear it is necessary for me to send you away on a very long journey—"

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"Oh, Uncle Antoine, Uncle Antoine, not away from Andrea; she needs me so!" Julie protested, striking the very note which cut Crozat to the heart. But the man had pulled down some of the pillars of the temple about his own ears, and must bear the blows which struck him.

"Yes, dear, I know it will be very hard on Andrea, but it must be done."

"Why?" Julie demanded; she rarely asked reasons of Crozat, but now she meant to know.

"It is because of your estates, Julie; you are a Huguenot; Madame de Maintenon and the priests about the King hate you for that. You see how they succeed in preventing your going before the King again—"

"Oh, is that all?" Julie listened to his reasons with a weary relief. "Then let the property go; Andrea needs me more than I need it."

Crozat was but little taken aback by this answer; knowing the girl's generosity, he had almost expected it.

"But that is not all, my dear. Madame de Maintenon demands, for a reason which I cannot give, that you be sent away."

Julie gazed at him, wonderingly.

"And her assistance," continued Crozat, "is very essential to a plan of mine." He hesitated a moment. "You know I have bought Louisiana; it is all on account of Andrea; I wish to make her the Princess of Louisiana; it is entirely for her sake that I—"

Julie put up her hand to stop him. "Uncle Antoine, I know Andrea better than you. She prefers to be left alone. She is already begging that I persuade you to send us both down to Montcœur—far into the country, where we will never see anybody again."

Crozat urged and pleaded, but it was no use. He was driven to his most powerful reason—or weapon—with which the cunning de Maintenon had provided him.

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"That is not all," he began, reluctantly. "I hoped you would agree without forcing me to tell you this. I have not explained to you fully why Madame de Maintenon hates you. Indeed, my whole purpose in sending you away is on your own account. The King has taken a sudden fancy to you; all of Paris is full of the gossip; everybody is talking about it. Madame is his wife, and—"

Julie sprang up; every vestige of color slowly left her cheek; she stood before Crozat, erect, and for a moment defiant. The old man turned his face away, ashamed of the blasting lie he had told. Then the scorching scarlet flooded into Julie's cheeks. She trembled and wavered, and held both hands up to conceal her degradation from the sight of men. But the girl had already overtaxed her powers of repression. In a moment she sank down beside Crozat, hid her flaming face upon his breast, and sobbed.

"Oh, Uncle Antoine, Uncle Antoine, what have I done to deserve this?"

"Nothing, dear—nothing;" the old man soothed her. "Nothing, dear; your whole conduct has been most dignified. But this may cause you great trouble, and would ruin any friend of yours who tried to help you."

Julie could not look at him again. She quivered like a debased and humiliated creature.

"Oh, Uncle Antoine, send me away; send me away," she pleaded—"anywhere."

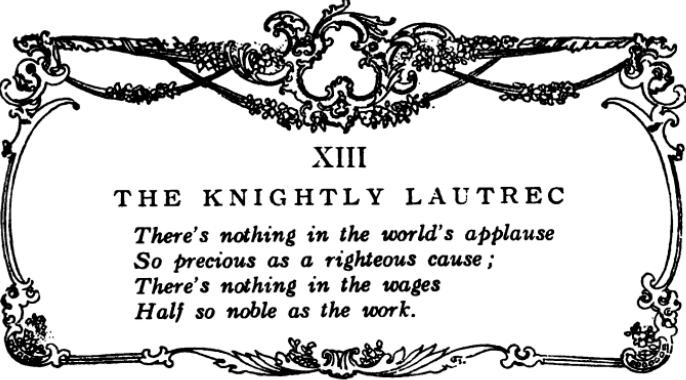
When Crozat swerved from the path of honor to trick Saint-Maurice, who trusted him, he took the first step into tortuous ways; with a little practice it came easier to deceive, and his conscience did not hurt him quite so much. But, in spite of this, he felt the pain of inflicting such a bitter sense of degradation upon this

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girl. His success was complete. And even when he mentioned the far-away colony as her destination, Julie did not object.

The Cévenol girl anxiously and earnestly made all her preparations, and at the last helped forward a pious deception which made Andrea believe she merely went for a few days journey to the Cévennes.





XIII

THE KNIGHTLY LAUTREC

*There's nothing in the world's applause
So precious as a righteous cause ;
There's nothing in the wages
Half so noble as the work.*

THE wagging tongues of Paris and the Court became louder and bolder; it was freely and openly stated that the son of the Duke of Vernais had not been killed, but had deserted. Now they even went further, and asserted that he had been seen to go aboard a vessel bound for America.

A lackey brought the tale home to Crozat's house; the laundress told it to the gaping maids; one of these busybodies repeated it to Andrea and Julie.

“I do not believe it,” Julie maintained stoutly; she preferred to count Saint-Maurice dead than to think this other horror of him.

But to the child-hearted Andrea there could be no terror so great as death; the child has hope to temper every living calamity, but none to twine about a tomb.

Andrea fastened upon this tiny ray of rumor, and clung tenaciously to it. When she had exhausted

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her eager inquiries among the maids and servants, she rushed to her father.

Julie tried in vain to hold her back, then remained alone in the room to think. But, no; she resolutely shook her head and refused to credit the story; terrible as was the certainty of his death, this alternative was worse.

Andrea burst into her father's room, glowing with excitement and indignation.

"Father, father, have you heard it? People say César is not dead, he has been seen—he has deserted and fled to America—the servants hear it everywhere. You must go—you must send somebody—do you believe it?"

Crozat had been hearing all of this for many days. "Tut, tut, child; gossip, mere gossip; there, now, be quiet."

But she wrenched herself loose from him. "No, no, it is *not* gossip; I will not believe he is dead; you told me yourself to be brave, that there might be some mistake; you said—"

Crozat had tried in many ways to temper the shock to Andrea, and now the girl remembered at once everything he had told her. "Come, come, Andrea, go back to your room and be quiet; I will look into this—"

"When?" she demanded—"when?"

"At once; the Duke and I will do everything—" he sought vainly to pacify her.

"Then you have already heard of it?" she demanded.

"Yes—we—" stammered Crozat.

"And did not tell me?"

With the best of his promises she was unsatisfied—they only added newer winds unto the tempest. Crozat could do nothing to calm the frightful nervous energy suddenly broken loose. When Andrea had spent her

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wild appeals he took her back gently to her own room, and left her with Julie.

This daughter of Crozat inherited much of his own self-will; she determined to act for herself, and act at once. Her father was hiding something from her; she knew it—she knew it. Then she bethought her of the Duke, and rested not an instant until she had gone to him.

She came back paler, quieter, more determined, and despatched a messenger immediately to Lautrec, praying that he come to her that very afternoon. And she took good pains that Julie should be sent away. The prudent Julie might not approve; Andrea was in no mood for prudence.

With a bounding heart Malcolm obeyed the summons and presented himself at the little side door designated by Andrea. Her maid admitted him instantly. Quietly, through the long, cool corridors, he was conducted to her own dainty sitting-room. There she stood, in a deep window recess, and, as he had not dared to hope, alone.

The man was shocked at the ravages of suffering in her face; her fingers were grown thin and blue, and there were dark hollows in her cheeks of deadly white.

She came forward, noiseless as a shadow that floats across the floor, her hand outstretched.

“Oh! I *knew* you would come.”

He kissed her hand, as he might that of some pale saint, and at her inclination seated himself beside her.

“My dear friend,” she began, leaning over towards him, her hands locked about her knees, her eyes fixed full and earnest upon his own—“my dear friend, I am in deep distress, and, knowing not where to turn, I have sent for you. Have I done wrong?”

The man, with a gentleman’s instinct, felt that here

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was no time for pretty speeches or courtly gallantries; so he replied: "No, mademoiselle, you have done quite right." Yet the woman understood.

"My dear Count Lautrec, you once did me the honor to tell me that my happiness was of some interest to you—that you loved me. And I, with perfect truth, told you my heart was not mine to give. That was true then—is truer now. Knowing this, would you yet render me a service?"

"I will, mademoiselle, and be made a better man for the opportunity," he replied without hesitation, his honest purpose shining from his eyes.

"My dear friend"—Malcolm winced at the repetition of the word "friend"—"I appreciate how trying this must be for you, and, when you know everything, you will understand that it is harder far for me. I believe you truly love me, and nothing but the direst necessity would drive me to ask such a service at your hands. I am so isolated in this—quite alone—and I do much require a loyal gentleman's aid."

The color had slowly left the face of the man, until now his skin was almost pale and pure as her own. He scarcely breathed, intent with ears and mind to catch her words and grasp her meaning.

"I loved César—" He flinched as if he were struck. "I love César, and César is not dead. Oh! I will not believe him dead. I have sent for you to tell me the truth. *Is he dead—is he dead?*"

Lautrec turned his face away.

"I beg you—beg you, Malcolm—tell me the truth; see how I suffer," and, whether he would or no, he turned to look at her again, and was lost.

"Tell me—tell me, Malcolm."

"I do not know," he faltered. "I—"

"Look at me—straight," she insisted. "Yes, yes, you *have* heard the same foul rumor which has come

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to me." The man could not stand her questioning, could not lie to her.

Andrea's words poured on: "A wretched lackey brings the story from the wine-shops—from God knows where—that César deserted and fled to America. Father will not tell me; he pets me as if I were a baby, and bids me be quiet. Bids me run like a child to my toys—God of mercy, how can I? Uncle Hector will tell me nothing—he beseeches me not to harass his wife by asking her. But he knows *something*, I am sure of it. He cannot look me in the face. Julie does not know. Oh! Malcolm, Malcolm, if you know aught of this, tell me. See—I am strong; I can bear it."

"Mademoiselle Andrea," he staggered along, "I did hear some such story; it is very persistently told, and some things seem to bear it out—"

Andrea sprang bolt upright.

"But it is not true—not true, monsieur; it is a lie—an evil lie."

Lautrec marvelled at the denunciation of her tense, upright figure, she standing so firm and looking him squarely in the eye. And the man's fighting blood exultantly worshipped the woman all anew.

"Monsieur, if it be true that César has gone to America, he has gone for good reasons, with his honor clear."

"I believe it, mademoiselle."

She bent down impetuously and took his hand a moment into her own. "You trust him, too? God bless you, Malcolm," she went on, with a lowered voice, full of sweetness and pathos, yet not the less of determination, using his own simple name. "I could bear to hear of his death; this other is insupportable. I want to know the truth—everything."

"And I will aid you, mademoiselle. Whatever man can do, I will."

Andrea opened her lips to speak again, and hesi-

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tated. She walked to the window and stood again in the shadow, looking out. "Yes, I *will* tell him. I ask much of him; I will trust him with much."

Then she came back slowly and stood before him.

"Malcolm"—she flushed as she began—"I have no more prospect of happiness in this world than you. I will tell you all, even as I know it myself. You may simply despise me, but I cannot help it." She moved closer to him, laid one hand, cold and colorless, yet steady withal, upon his sleeve. A moment the woman in her bade her pause again, then, nerving herself to the full, she said:

"Yes, it is proper. I ask much of you; I shall trust you with much. I love César, have loved him all my life, unconsciously as an infant sleeps. But"—she turned her face a moment from him while a swift dash of scarlet flickered into and faded from her cheek—"but," and her voice came almost without a tremor, "*César does not know it; he—does—not—love—me*, nor ever will. Only as the child loves the child; so with César."

She walked to the window again. When she came back, Malcolm had not moved or spoken.

"It is not your fault, nor mine—nor his," Andrea continued, strenuously. "A burden we must bear. Yet is mine the greater, for with it comes the humiliation to a woman. You—you can go to the wars, the gaming-tables; the world is broad, and open, and merry. *You can forget.* But to me, there is only this room, one day so like another—and to think, think, think."

Her whole frame trembled, and her cheeks burned with the glow of fire as from smouldering ashes. It seemed she was hardly conscious of what she said. The man felt almost guilty that he should listen to a confession under such excitement.

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"I had no knowledge that I loved him until a few months ago," Andrea went on, drearily. "He was to have married Mademoiselle d'Harlay; I bore that bravely. The news came that he died upon the field; that, too, I endured. This last I cannot, cannot bear. He *has* gone to Louisiana. I will *not* believe him dead. And some evil thing, I know not what, overhangs him. But I want to know—I *want to know*."

Her enforced composure deserted her now. The voice became almost a wail. Low and penetrating, it touched the listener's very soul, and shamed him that in her presence he should think of his own trivial pain.

In her eagerness, Andrea had taken him by the hand.

"Oh! won't you—won't you help me? Julie, my only friend, cannot aid me in this. And my father tells me it is nothing—to be brave and hope. Have you seen my father of late? Some trouble has aged him greatly. He is bent and old and feeble. He walks the floor at nights and talks to himself, as it is said demented people do."

And Malcolm thought quickly of his own demented mother—walking, walking, walking all the day, all the night, in her Picardy château.

"I watch him when he does not see. These dreadful wars and worries. I dare not tell him any trouble of mine, to put more weight upon him. I have no one else who cares—only you. Have I done wrong to tell you?"

He clasped her trembling hand more firmly and asked: "What would you have me do?"

"That is it—that is it," she replied hurriedly, "I do not know. I want to find him—find what the trouble is. Perhaps bring him back. Not back to me, but to his father, to his faith, to his honor." Then, upon the same sudden impulse, and moved by her own intense earnestness, she asked: "Would *you* go?"

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Simply, bluntly, he gave her a soldier's and a lover's answer: "To the ends of the earth, Andrea," and she knew he meant it, every word.

When the growing excitement in the girl's manner warned Malcolm it was time for him to leave, he kissed her hand in farewell, promising to return as she desired at the same hour on the morrow.

All this while he had not observed the cautious rustle of an inner portière, nor seen a woman's small, white hand thrust through its folds, beckoning him to approach.

Only when the low voice of Julie caught his ear did he turn. Julie had half drawn aside the portière, still holding it as a screen between herself and the girl at the window. She stood revealed to Malcolm, finger upon lip to enjoin silence, and, pointing to the outer door, whispered: "Wait."

Julie was already in the passage when Malcolm left Andrea, and motioned him to follow, which he did without protest or inquiry. Turning into a small room, where they could be alone, Julie brought the matter immediately to a point by saying:

"I heard all."

"For shame, mademoiselle!" Malcolm, with equal directness, replied.

"No, my lord, not for shame! for love," Julie corrected, and in the moment his anger was gone.

"She sent me away. I suspected something and soon returned. I heard your voices and listened. Nay, my lord, I beseech you do not color and seem ashamed; there lives not such another noble gentleman in France." She touched his nerveless hand almost in reverence.

Malcolm's breath came quick, his breast heaved. He was silent.

"I listened—yes," Julie continued, earnestly, "for

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her happiness is more to me than my own. Andrea is not herself, and I feared what she might do. But, thank God! her instinct has led her to trust a gentleman. Do you understand—all?"

Malcolm nodded; he could not speak.

"Yet you are willing to dare unknown dangers for the sake of a woman who does not love you, and to bring back to her the—" Julie could not say it.

Malcolm scarcely inclined his head.

"My lord, could you but have seen her as I have, a tender, gentle girl, shielded from every breath of human turbulence, drooping then beneath an anguish no man could understand, realizing the wretched helplessness of her love; could you have seen her when the news came of his death—her strength, her suffering. And then, ah! a thousandfold worse, when this keener torture came of his living, his rumored dishonor, and the horrible doubt. Could you have seen all this you would deny her nothing."

Malcolm stood through Julie's long speech as a graven image whose head throbbed, whose brain was numb.

"Mademoiselle, *I deny her nothing*," he said, simply; but there was a queer look in his wide-dilated eyes; the same look which lay in those of his poor demented mother.

The writhing lines of agony pinched at Malcolm's lips as with a cord, and for the first time Julie recognized the staunch manhood of this gentleman who loved Andrea with a nobility worthy his ancient name.

"Mademoiselle," Malcolm began, quietly, "have you anything further to say to me? If not, I crave your permission to go. My God! *my God!*" he burst out, "do you not see how I suffer? I cannot think now; to-morrow I will come."

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"To-morrow at the same hour," and she reverently stood aside for him to cross the threshold.

Out into the untroubled evening he walked, along the almost deserted streets, on and on and on, beneath the mocking twinkle of the stars, laughing at this puny human tempest—those great, placid, far-away stars.

Among the vagabond crowd on the Pont Neuf he found a moment's anchorage. There the shadow of the warrior king hurled its blackness across the square, distorted and forbidding, wavering upon the stones, and far out into the foggy, swirling river.

Farther down, the great towers of Notre Dame piled themselves in nimbus masses against the paler sky, monuments of gloom, grim witnesses of all the misery and all the heart-aches of these crawling children of men so very far beneath.

Deep, deep below, the black waters of the Seine beneath the bridge grumbled and murmured at their burdens, and the human stream upon the bridge grumbled and murmured at its own. And each rushed onward, ignorant alike to vast, mysterious oceans of dissolution and forgetfulness.

Long he stood there, gazing, thinking, suffering, rebelling.

Whatever was his thought, and whatever his temptation, it mattered not. The one was winnowed to the golden grain, the other conquered and trampled down.





XIV

THE CATCHER CAUGHT

*A man there was in Holy Writ
Who digged a deep and slipp'ry pit
To trap his neighbor;
Somehow himself he tumbled in,
And found in getting out again
Prodigious labor.*



ALL of this while the Duke of Vernais had been adding item by item to his information concerning the disappearance of his son. Closer and closer the clews ran to the cunning old spider who had builded up this web. Every thread started at the Ardennes forest and led directly to *Le Comte de Toulouse*, one of Crozat's vessels.

The Duke conferred many times with Crozat. Crozat disclaimed all knowledge, but offered to have diligent inquiries made in the colony.

Malcolm and Gaston were intensely interested in the search even before Andrea appealed to Malcolm's chivalry. Two or three days after Malcolm's promise, he began very insidiously to inflame the mind of Gaston with the idea of continuing their quest in Louisi-

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ana. It would be a brave adventure, if nothing more. Gaston was easily won, his curiosity fanned to white heat. Malcolm did not give him time to reconsider, but almost dragged him before the Duke, where they volunteered to cross the seas together.

The old Duke, deeply touched by their unselfish love for his son, accepted gratefully—this was a service for gentlemen, friends of his son, not one to be trusted to paid spies. The three went immediately to Crozat.

Crozat strenuously protested at first, and raised a thousand objections; but the men were determined. They would go on a vessel fitted by the Duke if not allowed to take passage on one of Crozat's.

Then Crozat, fearing he might attract more suspicion to himself, apparently fell into their way of thinking and furnished the young men with letters to Cadillac, his governor of Louisiana. He only insisted that they should keep their departure perfectly secret.

As Crozat reasoned, this did not embarrass him so very much. A prompt warning to César would keep him out of their way, and it would relieve Crozat's mind of a great load to have the protection of Gaston and Malcolm for Julie. Even should they find out anything, he could easily intercept whatever letters they wrote to France—the King did the same thing in his palace; why should not Crozat do it from over the seas?

It now came round to the day when they were to leave, a heart-breaking day to Julie. Besides her own misgivings, she had constantly to deceive Andrea, and make every preparation in strictest privacy.

On that very afternoon Crozat sent out many messengers, searched Paris for the Count Lautrec, and brought him to his study. The old man seemed much

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disturbed. He laid both his hands on Malcolm's shoulders and said: "My young friend, I am going to ask a great service of you." Crozat then told Malcolm as much as he thought wise of the King's fancy for Julie, exaggerating it grossly in order to secure Malcolm's resentful assistance.

"It is on this account that Mademoiselle de Severac goes to America. I now have information within the hour that the King means to send for her to-morrow." The fact was, Crozat's information came directly from de Maintenon, who commanded that the girl must on no account be allowed to come to Versailles, and Madame's injunction was much in the nature of a threat.

"You can easily see," Crozat continued to Malcolm, "in what an awkward attitude this places me. I am striving to regain her property for her. If this message reaches her and she declines to obey, her cause is ruined. However, if she can leave without knowledge of the King's wishes, it can be properly explained to him. So I mean to send her away earlier in the day, towards the south, as if she journeyed to the Cévennes. At Orleans she can turn and go directly west to St. Malo, where the vessel waits. This messenger, if he be diligent, will doubtless follow to deliver the King's commands. Can I rely on you to see that he does not come up with Mademoiselle de Severac?" It was a task entirely suited to Malcolm's taste, and he sprang at it with avidity. Neither did he forget that it was Andrea's father who thus took him into confidence.

It was speedily arranged that Gaston should take Malcolm's luggage by the direct road to the ship, while Malcolm made a *détour* by the other road and saw that no harm came to Julie.

Early next morning Malcolm waited in a side street near to Crozat's house. He had chosen as his com-

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panion a single serving-man, a stout fellow, shrewd and clever, with a bull-dog's courage and unquestioning devotion to his master.

About ten, Julie's carriage rolled away from Crozat's. It passed the south gate of Paris, taking the road which leads through Charenton to Orleans, twenty-five leagues away.

Near noon another equipage drew up grandly before Crozat's door; a jaunty, curly headed, perfumed Italian stepped daintily out and entered the house. Malcolm knew the fellow, Francini, for a low adventurer, ready to undertake any service which brought a prompt return of gold. But he did not suspect that Madame herself had secretly arranged his employment in this affair in order to cast as much odium upon it as possible.

After what seemed a very short while, though Crozat had politely detained Francini as long as possible, they came together to the door, and Crozat himself pointed out the way Julie had taken. It was essential that the old man should seem to play fair with the King. Francini's carriage rumbled off at a brisk pace; Malcolm and his man Joseph followed.

The whole day Malcolm kept Francini in easy sight, until about eight in the evening, when Francini shifted horses at Toury, some eighteen leagues from Paris; Orleans lay yet six leagues to the south. From the best reports Malcolm could gather along the road, Julie's carriage kept its lead very well, possibly on account of the prompt relays previously arranged. Though Francini drove rapidly, he had many tedious waits for horses.

At his rate of travel, Malcolm knew Francini could reach Orleans before midnight. Malcolm thought it wise to come up with him at Toury.

The impatient Italian had bounded out of his car-

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riage into the waiting-room at the inn, and was stretching his legs, stamping around with great clamor, when Malcolm entered.

"Why, it is my friend Francini!" he exclaimed; "well met, well met."

Francini was highly delighted at a gentleman's notice.

"Greeting to you, my lord—greeting to you; and whither do you journey?"

"I have some affairs at Orleans. But since you are here and it seems a cosey den, I also rest here for the night. Joseph there is a dull companion, and I have many days' ride yet before me. Ho, there, landlord! some wine—the best. This flying dust has settled in my throat and requires a washing down. The wine of Toury is famous, Francini—come," and Malcolm beckoned Francini to sit with him.

The notorious Italian was not often invited to wine by gentlemen of the Count de Lautrec's quality.

"One glass, one glass only, my lord, for good comradeship; my business presses and I must push on to Orleans to-night." Francini was wiping his hands on a delicate kerchief and making wry faces at the gritty dirt he rubbed off.

"Here, landlord, a basin and some water," Malcolm called. "I swear, my ears are stopped with all this dirt; has it rained hereabouts since the deluge?" And he began a great scrubbing, and splashing, and spluttering, which lured Francini to do likewise.

"There's a sensible fellow," applauded Malcolm, pouring fresh water for the Italian. "Now we can enjoy our wine. Business should never interfere with gentlemen's pleasures."

Meanwhile Malcolm had given Joseph a commission. Joseph looked in the door directly, and nodded that it was done.

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Francini was not slow to accept Malcolm's advances; they talked and sang, and drank and joked. Nevertheless, the keen adventurer did not forget his errand. The precise old clock beneath the stairs, which measured neither the disgust of Malcolm nor yet the swelling conceit of Francini, had only ticked off twenty-two minutes before the King's much-inflated emissary strutted again to his carriage.

From the porch of the inn Malcolm watched his triumphal departure.

Serious as the matter had become, he laughed outright in anticipation of the fall which was to follow all this pride. When the carriage had gone out of hearing, Malcolm leaned over the balustrade and called "Joseph."

"Here, master," Joseph answered, almost at his elbow.

"Is it done?"

Joseph nodded his dull head, and grinned at the disappearing carriage.

"Good," and Malcolm sat down to wait the crash. It came almost instantly.

Malcolm heard confused cries in the darkness, one shrill scream—that must be Francini—and a sturdier voice, swearing at the horses. Then Francini's groom came galloping back, calling loudly for men and lanterns; the coach had broken down, his master was killed; their damnable roads were not fit for Christian gentlemen to travel over.

His corpulent oaths scared out two or three sleepy stable-boys, who, with much ill-humor and smoky lamps, trudged down the road to the scene of the mishap.

Poor, little, draggled Francini limped back at the head of a mournful procession—Francini, spattered and mired, and voluble in his denunciations, for he had tumbled into a stream at the foot of the hill.

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"My dear Francini, what a misfortune! Are you hurt?" Malcolm inquired, anxiously, sitting him down in front of a cheerful fire. He soon had the Italian out of his muddy clothes, despite continued protests that he must continue his journey.

But wine and jollity and good cheer reconciled Francini to the inevitable, and morning had almost come when Malcolm slipped away to his bed while Joseph watched. They journeyed after breakfast.

As the tall towers of Orleans cathedral hove in sight, Malcolm called into Francini's window, inviting him to dine at the sign of "The Two Pikes."

But no amount of urging could induce Francini to delay any further. He well understood he would have to mend his gait if he ever expected to come up with the party ahead.

Malcolm knew that Francini supposed Julie to be travelling south to the Cévennes.

So, as soon as Francini had rounded a corner, Malcolm despatched Joseph along the back streets to the south gate. There were many idlers and marketmen lounging about. Joseph took two of these precious scamps aside and gave them a careful description of Julie's party.

They were instructed to wait for Francini when he came, and inquired, as he was sure to do, if such a party had gone that way, and to send him south in hot pursuit of nothing.

Then Joseph hid himself inside a road-house at the gate and watched them through the dirty little panes.

Francini was prompt. He rattled up and asked the by-standers if any of them had seen Julie's party; none remembered except these two rascals, who lied glibly enough at five livres each.

"Yes," they said, "we met them when we came with the marketing, just after daylight; we met them driv-

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ing at good speed towards La Ferte St. Aubin"—a village ten leagues away on the south road.

Joseph had the satisfaction of seeing Francini whip at his horses and disappear in a cloud of fine dust.

He paid the men, and rejoined his master at the west gate.

Then they rode west, Malcolm and Joseph, through Patay, Châteaudun, and Alençon, resting at Mortagne. All went well with Julie; at every village they had news of her.

Malcolm planned to lag along and watch the road. Francini might not go far before he discovered his error, and he could easily set himself right in Orleans. It was now too late for him to catch Julie along the route, but he might, perchance, arrive in time to prevent her sailing.

The little village of Pontorson lies some twenty leagues west of Alençon, just where the Fougeres road crosses, going to the Bay of Mont St. Michel, scarcely a league away. Already the gulls flew about their heads, the fresh sea-odors filled their nostrils, and the horse and man heartened up at the smelling.

Malcolm had spent the night here, thinking to ride into St. Malo with the early day. He was now but two hours' easy jogging to the end of his rear-guard duty.

Before the sun came he and Joseph were astir, awaiting their horses and stretching their lungs to the utmost with the exhilarating air. Malcolm looked back the way they came, and stopped stock still to watch a carriage lumbering down the hill. He unconsciously raised a finger, to call Joseph's attention. There was no mistaking that gaudy outfit.

"Francini," said Joseph.

"Francini," repeated Malcolm, and Joseph looked at his master, wondering what he would do now.

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True, Julie was safe enough in St. Malo, possibly aboard, but Francini might use his royal warrant to stop the vessel. Before Malcolm had time to consider of it well, the carriage stopped, and Francini stuck his head out of the window.

"Ho, there, you rascal! Can we get a quick breakfast here—and horses—what! the devil! Count Lautrec! you here?"

"Yes, I was journeying in this direction; I thought you went to the south."

"So I did, so I did, but my bird flew towards the sea. I went far after the wrong quarry. But I've travelled by night and day to make it up. The men are worn out." His fellows did look fagged and famished, and more than half rebellious.

"Best come to my room, Francini, and get yourself freshened; you can have your breakfast sent there. Why, man, you look as if you might have a rigor."

Francini, nothing loath, followed Malcolm to his room. Malcolm beckoned Joseph, and had a few whispered words. Joseph took his station just outside and listened expectantly. And he grinned as if the expected was pleasant to contemplate.

Inside, Francini had flung off his cloak and coat and plunged his arms elbow-deep into a great bowl of fresh water.

Suddenly Malcolm grasped him by both wrists, holding his arms high above his head. The fellow looked up, startled and wondering.

Malcolm's face was close to his.

"Silence!" he whispered.

"What is—" stammered Francini.

"Hush, not a word or I—" and he dragged Francini near enough to the door to call "Joseph." The acute-eared fellow came instantly.

"Any one in hearing?"

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“No, master.”

“Here, Francini, quick; off with your clothes—get into bed.”

“But, I—” he began to protest.

“Hush, you sneaking vulture, hush—”

“Would you murder me?” Francini begged, pitifully. He was struggling to free himself, but not seriously, as a man who hopes to succeed.

“Not unless you make it necessary; take off your clothes.”

Francini hesitated.

“Take them off for him, Joseph,” commanded Malcolm. Together they wheeled him round as if he were a spinning-top, while his outer garments were shaken from him and he was bundled into bed. Never was there so swift an undressing.

“Watch the door, Joseph.”

Joseph stood grinning in the passage-way; Francini lay huddled helplessly on the bed.

“Would you murder me?” he whimpered again.

Malcolm paid no attention to him.

“Here, Joseph, go down and tell the men they have an hour’s rest for breakfast; their master is taken with a rigor.” And Francini’s teeth chattered as though the shivering wretch did in fact have a rigor.

“Order the men some wine,” Malcolm supplemented; “a few glasses to my very good health will warm their blood.”

Joseph was gone; Malcolm settled down to wait.

From the rooms below came up the echoes of good cheer.

“Let us understand each other, Francini.” Malcolm was quiet, as if it were a matter of mere pleasantry. “We wait here together, you and I, for an hour; then you shall send for your driver. Tell him you are too ill to travel, and I have kindly consented to go

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forward in your stead. It is very simple, is it not?"

"Yes, very simple, but—" Francini tried to be nonchalant.

"But it could be improved on? Yes. For instance, I might run this long knife through you, so you would have honorable scars to show your king. However, that is not essential."

Francini squirmed, and hastened to admit he could get along very nicely without the scars. Malcolm did not feel proud of bullying so miserable a creature, but that was better than to hurt him.

"Very good. Then you order the driver to make the carriage ready and I will leave you here with a whole skin; otherwise—"

Francini spent a very bad hour alone in the room with Malcolm until Jules, the driver, was sent for.

"Your master has become thoroughly chilled," Malcolm explained to Jules, as he stood at the foot of the bed. "Do you know anything of such disorders? Feel his head."

The man laid a doubtful hand upon the other's forehead. It was chill and clammy.

"Yes, m'sieu, I believe it is a rigor," Jules answered.

Malcolm looked steadily at his captive and motioned for him to begin. Fear had taught Francini his lesson so perfectly that he did not skip a word.

"Be quick, Jules," Malcolm suggested in addition to the orders Francini gave, "so we can return this way without delay. Francini must be taken to Alençon, where there is said to be a famous leech. Joseph, here, will wait on him until we come back again."

A quiet pair they were whom Malcolm left in that upper room when he turned his face towards the sea. Joseph had his instructions not to let the fellow stir until the night, and he meant to carry out his orders.

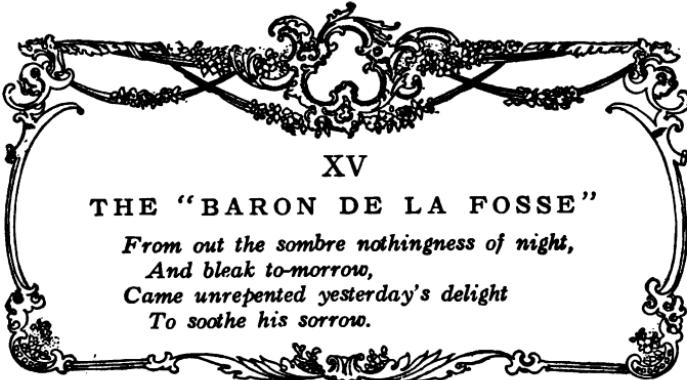
THE CATCHER CAUGHT

Joseph sat beside the bed and grinned; Francini lay huddled in the bed and sulked.

This affair of Julie made a great noise in the fashionable world. It was told, retold, and dilated upon by Francini, who glorified himself into the hero of a thrilling adventure. And the whole herd of sycophants who dared not so much as raise their eyes when the despot was looking, split their irreverent sides when his royal back was turned. This was something new even in that glutted Court—a silly girl running away from the King, and the King's bird-catcher lying in bed like a trussed fowl while her lover rode off in the King's own carriage. So ran the tale. De Maintenon's skirts were immaculate. Crozat played the deceived guardian, and came in for his share of the raillery.

At any rate, the de Severac girl was gone. Whatever people said they whispered behind the door, or in the closets—for the stately Court kept discreet silence concerning the whole occurrence.





XV

THE "BARON DE LA FOSSE"

*From out the sombre nothingness of night,
And bleak to-morrow,
Came unrepented yesterday's delight
To soothe his sorrow.*

MALCOLM had timed his arrival well. It lacked two hours yet until noon when he alighted in the rough old Breton village where these rugged sailors had dared the storms for near a thousand years. Yonder lay the *Baron de la Fosse*, tugging at her tether, surrounded by a school of smaller craft taking aboard belated equipment and people. Malcolm ordered Jules, the driver, to await his return from the vessel in order that Francini might be delayed of his carriage until the night. Then he engaged a fisherman to put him on the ship.

His little boat tossed about on the heavy swells like a glistening bubble, and bumped itself wellnigh to breaking against the vessel's side, while the boatman strove to catch the rope dangling above him.

"Hullo, Malcolm," called Gaston, leaning over the gunwale. "We feared you were lost on the road."

Malcolm clambered actively aboard and looked about

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him at the ship's company, with whom his lot was to be cast for so many weeks.

Crozat's agents innumerable had long been active in gathering emigrants who were to people the new colony. They were not choice in their selection.

Miners were secured: the men whose brawny alchemy was to turn the soil of promise into golden fulfilment. Soldiers were enlisted, that force might be used to subdue the warlike tribes which guarded fabulous treasure. Criminals were transported as hewers of wood and drawers of water.

Daughters of sturdy poverty were there, each with her dower in a casket furnished by Crozat; and with the chance of a husband in the forest, they dared the seas and dared the wilderness, playing blindfold the time-worn game of mating and of hoping.

And other women had been sent, less honest, in their tattered finery and tattered characters, some with but a scant remaining spark of that desire for better things which seldom wholly dies; women whose sins had closed the doors of penitence behind them—for even the gospel of forgiveness holds out no promise to a prodigal daughter. These, with a half-score sons of recklessness, who invaded every clime, made up the human burden borne by the *Baron de la Fosse*.

It was late in the afternoon before the wind shifted and a favoring breeze sprang up off shore.

Julie sought to interest herself in things about her; strove to forget the humiliation she had left behind, the vague uncertainties of what lay further on ahead. Now she stood, watching the swarthy Genoese man the yards and drop the greedy canvas bellying to the wind. Square after square in quick succession bared its bosom to the freshening impulse. Steadier and steadier the good ship swung quivering about, an excited, unleashed human thing. Gathering speed

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and courage with every leap, it cleft the darkening sea, until the coast of France behind them, with here and there a flickering fire-fly of light, seemed only a homesung, haunting melody, whose strains had melted slow away.

Julie turned her eyes and watched the pitiless distance blot out everything she loved. And all around her and all about her were the swishing waves, the muttering of the winds, the stars that played at hide-and-seek with the lowering curtains of the sky. And all within her was death and solitude, and dumb rebellion.

The lonely woman had many an endless hour to think, and more and more she let her thoughts rest upon Saint-Maurice.

The brightest spot along the road is always first to catch the eye which turns its glance behind—so Julie's memory turned faithfully to the sunniest hours of her life. She thought of the little glade at Rougemont.

Gaston had business with the captain for Crozat, who had intrusted him with that part of his plan which was to prevent the return of Saint-Maurice and to smother any news of him before it should reach France. As Crozat had stated the situation to him, Gaston did not feel that he was playing the traitor, but that he and Crozat were acting for the best good of all.

In another part of the vessel, far away from Julie, Malcolm sat alone. For he, like Julie, felt in no mood for laughing companionship. He listened to the sailors singing as they trimmed the steady sails. The words came high and strong in lulling pauses, and fitful when the winds blew loud :

“ It’s little we care whether winds be fair,
Or whether the masts be quaking;
It’s lightly we reck of a blood-stained deck—
There’s yellow gold for the taking.

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Sing hol' my dear,
For the bold buccaneer,
It's over the seas we are going;
We'll meet black death with a laughing breath
Though the tempests of hell be blowing."

As a lullaby heard again in maturer years might bring his childhood back to man, so did this song bear Malcolm back again to other times and other rhymes, when such a lusty life was his. And the recollection of those dead yesterdays made more wretchedly real the desolation of all his living, cold to-morrows.

In this humor he was disturbed. It was a woman who came softly and seated herself upon a coil of rope at his feet, who now crept to him and rested a hand upon his knee.

She was the yesterday of his youth; of youth when laws of God and laws of man alike were set at naught by laws of lawless love—lawless love, redolent of the boulevards, the thronged streets, the revelry of cafés, the wild license of Bohemia—ay, redolent even of a certain sweet content, and half contrition for dear sins self-confessed. This buried yesterday stretched out a soft hand through the shimmer of her shroud, and laid that hand in gentleness upon his rebel heart's defiance. And almost holy was the consolation of her touch.

"Fifi," she said; that was all. An old love name, plucked from an old love shrine.

Malcolm was in that placidly receptive mood when nothing brings surprise.

"Nicolette," he answered, "you here? And—"

"Yes, I tired of it and came. You told me once that I would tire some day. I did not know that you were here; believe me, Fifi, I did not know. But the good, kind years have made me no longer a danger to you. Is it not true, Fifi? To-night I am down-hearted

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and lonely; in spite of myself I followed you out here in the dark. Did I do wrong, Fifi?"

"No, Nicolette; you are welcome. I, too, am weary of the strife."

"I tired of the theatre, and the lights, and the old life," the woman continued, drearily. "I came to Sister Katherine; she is gentle—she understands. I may be of some use over yonder." In the dark she lifted her hand and pointed to the leaden west.

They talked as they listed, and forbore their idle speech. As she came, without his knowledge, the woman was gone again.

Involuntarily, Malcolm reached out his hand towards the stolid coil of rope as if that could give her back. And, like his hand, his groping soul reached out again from the love which was denied him, towards this other love which was his own and he had tossed away. Tossed away, but not in harshness, for Nicolette had told him once: "Such as you are not for such as I. You must go." And after months—yea, years—he went. Then this other love of his, so new, so differently dear, came to abide with him forever.

During the long, idle days of the voyage Julie had leisure for many thoughts which troubled her and which she could not put aside. Day after day she would sit upon the deck, watching the rail rise above the sky-line, then monotonously dip into the sea again. Persistently she tried to fix her mind upon her own affairs, the regaining of her estates, her humiliating flight from the King. But as the shaken needle returns always quivering to the pole, her thoughts came forever back and settled upon Saint-Maurice.

Malcolm lived restlessly through his morbid hours, and leaned heavily upon Nicolette. But while the companionship and sympathy of Nicolette came close beside and comforted him, it was always Andrea who

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stood alone in his heart. And the woman's intuition of Nicolette fully comprehended the impassable deserts which separated Malcolm from the days that were gone.

On a clear, dark night, their last night at sea, after one of those long spells of silence which emphasized their loneliness when she and Malcolm sat together, Nicolette timidly began :

"Fifi, may I tell you something?"

"Yes."

"And you will not drive me away?"

"No, Nicolette; why should I?"

"I have done an evil thing, but I did not know; I was so giddy and thoughtless. I would feel better if I confessed it to some one. Were I of the holy Church I would tell it to the priest; but I fear them, those priests, they do not know what it is to do wrong and to suffer for it. One learns so much through sin. Before this, I had never harmed any one."

"Well, go on; I am listening." His tones were kind, always kind to her.

"You may tell me I did wrong, very wrong; I know that; but you must not despise me. I have so little now. When the old life ended, for you and for me, I did not think I cared so very much—then. I had many to laud, many to flatter, hundreds to clap their hands when I danced and amused them. I thought that flattery was enough for a woman. I knew no other life. Then this thing happened, and I learned better."

"Well, Nicolette, what is it that is so very terrible?"

"You know I was playing at the theatre, mostly parts of the north-country folk, peasant songs, and dancing. One evening when I had left the stage a man came to my dressing-room and told me he knew how I could make a great deal of money. I asked him how. He said it was very easy. It would take

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me away from Paris for two weeks. I told him I could not do it, I would lose my engagement. He said that would not matter, his patron was very rich and generous, and would pay more than my whole year's salaries came to. After a while I went with him to his patron, an old man who seemed good and kind, but with eyes so sharp they looked quite through me.

"All he wanted me to do was to go to where the army had camped, then in my own country, the Ardennes, and take with me a costume I used in the theatre, that of a yellow-haired Ardennaise. I was to play a trick upon a young soldier, a jest—as he explained it, to win a wager.

"I did not then think how foolish this was. I thought it a merry prank, and consented. Especially as they paid so handsomely, a large part in advance. These rich people have many queer whims, I thought, and when they are silly enough to squander their money, so much the better for us. So I feigned reluctance and put up the price, which was already high enough; but I doubled it. Had I known what it was for, *mon Dieu!* I would not have touched a single dirty livre.

"Then I rehearsed what I had to do, with the two men who were to help. I come of the Ardennes people, you know; it is my mother-tongue.

"It was planned that these men were to find when this young officer was on watch, or guard, what you call it, and I should run up to him through the woods, dressed as a little girl, and cry that the man would not let me pass; then beg him to let me go to my dying mother in the hut yonder, or some such story—oh, I could do it well enough, they said. I was to weep and plead with him.

"Then if he let me go I would slip back by another way and return to Paris. That was all. It did not seem so wicked, did it, Fifi?

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"So I did it. The young man was very handsome, and very good. At first he could not let me through —'against orders,' he said. I begged and wept, and told him how poor we were, and how far I had gone to fetch the medicine, and showed him the phial, and looked so tiny and harmless and scared; he at last glanced about to see if any one saw, and gave me a piece of silver, and patted me on the head and smiled, and said I did not look so very dangerous.

"He did not tell me I might go, but he turned his back and went to fix his saddle. I ran on past him and met the other men who had gone with me. They brought me back to Paris. I was gone only five days. That was all.

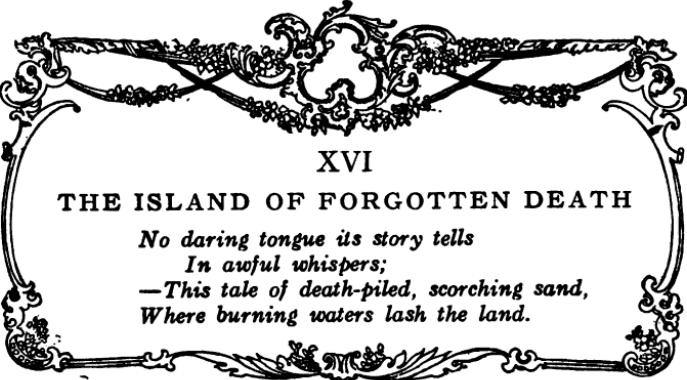
"On the return to Paris I listened closely whenever the men talked, and I am sure they made a tool of me to ruin that young man, who seemed so good and kind; I heard them say he would be disgraced. I heard afterwards that he had been killed that very night."

Nicolette stopped a long while, her head resting on his knee. "Then I went to Sister Katherine, told her I wanted to leave the theatre, and she brought me with her."

When she had quite finished, she lifted her weary head from his knee; and gazed into his face. Malcolm tried to comfort her by saying it was perhaps only an accident that the unknown officer had been killed that night, and she was not to blame.

That was their last night on the ship. They had bowled along for days through welcoming summer seas, the fresh, sweet breezes of the south pushing them on with hospitable breath.

When morning dawned, a dim, dark line showed clear the land where some of them, perchance, would find their dimmer, darker fortunes.



XVI

THE ISLAND OF FORGOTTEN DEATH

*No daring tongue its story tells
In awful whispers;
—This tale of death-piled, scorching sand,
Where burning waters lash the land.*

DIVIDING the land of the Mobilians, which, with its pine-grown barriers, here confronts the Southern Sea, is a broad, deep estuary, an uneven wedge of water, cleaving the darker forest hues as a patch of soft blue might stand widely open between the duller clouds.

And a noble bay it is, perhaps of seven good leagues width, running most fair and straight inland towards the jagged islands at its head, branching there like the outspread fingers of an open hand.

Thence, each going its independent way, two adventurous rivers wriggle their tortuous course far up into the savage country where lived strange peoples, and where stranger things did happen.

But this placid harbor, having its affairs beside the sea, only watched and laughed at the rivers, laughed as a sober father might at wayward children's play. Seductively though they taunted the bay, inviting it to wander with them seeking newer things, it stead-

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fast held itself where Manitou had given it useful duties to perform.

It may have been some score or more of years before this when the gallant Iberville shoved the inquisitive prow of his vessel farther and farther westward into the very tepid heart of these sultry tropic seas. Evening came on murmuring, mumbling, boding a sullen harm, and the flapping canvas hardly roused a ripple beneath his vessel's figure-head. Iberville, in a small boat, had started ashore to search for fresh water when one of those violent outbursts of southern temper struck the coast, and, hurling his light craft before it, drove them all waist-deep upon the shelving, sandy shore.

There through the long, long night Iberville, the explorer of ice-locked northern waters, paced back and forth in the pelting rain.

At every step his feet struck obstacles in the sand; some smooth and round, some long, and some small; some seemed in single pieces, and others hung together like the hoops of a broken cask. Too disturbed in mind to be curious, the great navigator never stopped to see what were these uncanny things upon which he trod and bruised his feet in the dark. Only when he sat for rest upon a hummock did his hand strike one of the round objects. Quite involuntarily he picked up the thing—a wet and clammy skull, a skull smoothed and bleached with rolling in the scorching sand. When morning came, in nunnish gray and quietude, he saw the beach strewn with these hideous skulls, these broken thighs and shoulder-blades—ghastly mementoes of the unremembered dead; unremembered, for even the Indian traditions hushed at the name of "Massacre Island," as if their folk-tales feared to speak of such awesome things.

And to this good day no man knows the truth concerning the Island of Forgotten Death.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

Years afterwards Iberville died of yellow fever at Havana; and when Crozat assumed control of the Louisiana colony a fortress was erected upon Massacre Island, its name changed to Dauphine, in honor of the coming Queen, and it was designated as the official residence of Lamothe Cadillac, the new governor.

This was the island to which Saint-Maurice came, this was the island to which the *Baron de la Fosse* was bound, bearing Julie, Malcolm, and Gaston.

After twenty years of hard fighting against the Indians and the cold of Canada, Lamothe Cadillac had, by a ludicrous accident, been summoned to govern in Louisiana. To his florid imagination this was the beginning of most romantic fortunes.

Fifty-two years left him still a poor lieutenant-colonel with meagre prospects, and poor as when he left his remnant of a castle to change steel for gold abroad.

Cadillac's meagre lordship lay beside the Garonne, its single ivy tower serving only as a monument of vanished glory. His daughter of eighteen was another disappointment, for she, being his only child, the proud Gascon family name would perish with himself.

Inflammable as the Spanish creation of Cervantes, his soul took fresh fire when he found himself called to rule, as vice-regent of the King, the wonderful and fabulous region watered by the Hidden River. The awakening was bitter.

He counted upon his empire island perhaps a dozen fig-trees of goodly dimension, three wild pears, a miserable, stunted plum, and thirty feet, perhaps, of rusted grape-vine, bearing some unripe, rotten clusters. This was his domain of glory.

His imperial guard was scattered about through the woods in drunken carouse among the Indian tribes, living a life of forest freedom, preferring the Indian

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maids to those Frenchwomen who had been brought over to make them wives. And this, to Cadillac's infinite embarrassment, left these wrangling women unmarried on his hands.

On this particular afternoon he walked abroad, and to the very few people whom he met he vouchsafed a bow of gorgeous grandeur, the waving curls of his wig rustling with a pardonable vanity that they covered a head so exquisitely noble.

His orderly met him and saluted.

"Monsieur de Bienville awaits your Excellency's pleasure."

Cadillac starched himself into a more exactly perpendicular and condescending majesty, and with slow, dignified steps turned to the vice-regal residence—otherwise that square-built log-house which usually sheltered his august person.

The former governor, Bienville, the brave young Canadian, brother to the famous Iberville, had just been displaced and Cadillac elevated to his position. With a rare patriotism he remained in the colony, receiving orders from another where he had previously held stormy command. It was *his* genius, *his* management, and *his* diplomacy with the Indian tribes which had for many years held the savages off from an attack which would have meant utter annihilation. If his brother had founded the colony, Bienville had nurtured it, and now that same fatherly interest kept him from abandoning his people to a destruction which seemed inevitable. The restless tribesmen up country became more threatening every day.

From the strained and pompous manner of Cadillac's greeting to Bienville it was very plain these two men were not friends. Both were courteous—too punctiliously so. Bienville maintained his frank and outwardly respectful bearing, deeply as he appreciated

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the other's ignorance of Indian traits, and the rigid necessity for temporizing with the nations.

Cadillac wasted no time on preliminaries. He was really a soldier—a gallant one, there could be no doubt as to that. Even his superficial follies, his quizzical appearance and odd conceits, which made him ludicrous at times, could not wholly destroy the respect which his courage had won.

"Monsieur de Bienville," he began, "the Natchez have killed four of my people who were on their way to trade with the Illinois. They must be taught a severe lesson. You will take de Richebourg's company, with fifteen Canadians to man your boats. Proceed at once up the river, punish the murderers, and erect a stout fort in their territory, that we may hold that perfidious nation in check for the future. You will convey my instructions to de Richebourg, and depart at once."

Bienville straightened up in his chair. Twice he opened his lips to speak, and changed his mind until he could fully consider what was best. He well knew such a foolhardy enterprise meant death to all concerned.

"Do you mean, governor—"

"Precisely what I said."

"But, governor, have you not been badly advised in—"

"I summoned you here to receive orders," Cadillac replied, curtly, "not to hold a council of war. My course is decided; you will simply carry out the plan. *I am responsible.*"

"But, governor—"

"Is Bienville afraid?" he sneered. "If so, I will name another to take command."

Bienville colored faintly; then his calm, clear features settled in their accustomed repose.

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"I need not answer that, governor; my thirteen years here will reply for me. But I deem it my duty—"

"Your duty is to obey, not to quibble."

"I deem it my duty to remind you that the Natchez muster eight hundred disciplined warriors, the most powerful of the nations; at a pinch the Chickasaws will surely help them, perhaps the Tunicas. Such an expedition would be sheer madness. They will destroy us first, then, emboldened by success, would unite and destroy this colony. With such a small force—"

"Your glory will be the greater if you succeed."

"True, but it will sacrifice many a brave man, when we cannot afford to spare a single one."

"I can well spare de Richebourg's company of vagrants."

Bienville began to see the reason for this scheme, especially as the governor, who could never hold his tongue, went on sarcastically:

"You and de Richebourg ought to be able to do such a trivial thing quite alone."

Bienville protested no more. He arose to go, and his tightly compressed lips, the firm, square chin, spoke the quiet determination of the man. He saluted and withdrew.

Cadillac settled back in his chair, a smile of triumph lighting up his now evil-looking face.

"So much for the arrogant Canadian. Refuse a Cadillac's daughter—ugh," and his nose tipped up to a still more disdainful angle.

Bienville at once sought de Richebourg, who this evening was entertaining his new friend, Captain Ernest Crenan—a tall fellow, with a broad streak of white in his hair.

De Richebourg, a cool, daring, amiable, and somewhat eccentric officer, brought with him to the colonies

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a variegated and sensational record of brave deeds and unnecessary duels. A man of genuinely kind and pleasant manners, it seemed odd that he should have been embroiled in so many sanguinary encounters, and been uniformly the victor. A last, particularly outrageous challenge, duel, and death on the Continent forced him to leave his country and seek spirited adventure in more complaisant lands.

When Bienville came quietly into de Richebourg's cabin, one who knew him well could easily perceive that something weighty disturbed his mind. He did not take long to tell it with his customary blunt directness.

"Cadillac orders me to take your troop, de Richebourg, and crush the Natchez at once. You will make them ready."

"The devil he does!" De Richebourg sprang up in surprise. "Why, I've only thirty-two men, and they not of the best. Is the fellow raving mad?"

"Yes—no. I thought so myself at first, but now I believe he is maliciously sane."

"My company would be a mere handful for such an expedition."

"Yes, it is rank suicide—first, for us; afterwards, for the colony. Stung Serpent would slaughter us; then, flushed with victory, sweep Biloxi and Fort Dauphine into the sea. It would furnish the very excuse they need to bring all the tribes into an alliance against us. Cadillac shows himself to be a fool; towards you and me, though, he has other intent."

"What intent?" asked de Richebourg, not always very penetrating, for Bienville knew a small matter whereof de Richebourg was ignorant.

Captain Crenan sat, all interest, and listened. This sort of warfare and these curious quixotic campaigns possessed for him the fascination of absolute novelty.

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“Well—” and Bienville seemed to hesitate a moment at the stranger’s presence; but de Richebourg, who knew Crenan better, seemed content. So Bienville went on:

“Just here, and between gentlemen, I will tell you. Of course you will understand how reluctant I am to speak of a matter so delicate, but now it has become of serious moment, and I need your good advice.” Bienville looked teased and foolish, but soon plunged again into his narrative.

“It is no more than this. Some weeks ago I received an invitation from Cadillac to visit him alone. He was so gracious and condescending it aroused my suspicion. After a long discourse on the grandeur of his race, their greatness in France, he proposed that I should marry his daughter.”

De Richebourg’s fine, sarcastic lip curled, but Bienville did not perceive it.

“Imagine my surprise. He had never before spoken three unnecessary words to me in his life. It is that romantic girl’s silly doings. Tactfully as I could, I disclaimed matrimonial ambitions and declined the honor of the alliance. I will not bore you with details; you know Cadillac. He was furious, an outraged demi-god. Now I believe he sends me on this expedition simply to get me killed. And he selects you, de Richebourg, for the same affectionate reason.”

De Richebourg stared; he was no logician himself, merely a fighter, but he could see through a millstone when the hole was pointed out.

César de Saint-Maurice, or Crenan, as he was known in the colony, said nothing. In fact, he moved to go, fearing he might embarrass their discussion. But Bienville stopped him, reading his thought.

“No, captain, we have nothing to conceal from gentlemen, confiding in their honor. As soldiers, de Riche-

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bourg and myself must obey, or be disgraced. As men, we may freely discuss among ourselves the stupid folly of such an undertaking."

Having once expressed their confidence in Captain Crenan, the two experienced soldiers of the wilderness proved it by discussing the enterprise fully in his presence. Saint-Maurice listened eagerly to these men, who spoke of fabulous things in the most ordinary phrase.

Saint-Maurice went thoughtfully to his cabin, thinking over the strange campaign upon which his two friends were about to embark. He was already beginning to learn something of the ins and outs of this little colony to which he had come about a month before.

His arrival had been a source of considerable interest to the French gentlemen quartered on these shores. Little as these exiles had to talk about, it was most natural they should discuss Captain Crenan. He was young, polished, of elegant manners and noble bearing, but said absolutely nothing of himself or of his people. He brought all court and army gossip to the colony; he spoke often with knowledge of the most prominent people and important events, not boastingly, but with the ease of habit. He was courteous to all, intimate with none, and they learned he held the rank of captain in the army. But the most remarkable thing was the great deference shown him by his High Mightiness the Governor. Saint-Maurice had no particular duties to perform, and no amusements—nothing to do but brood upon his own disgrace, the crushing sorrow he had brought the Duke and Duchess.

Though he made no intimate friends, his associations were rather with those officers directly under Bienville. For Bienville himself he had conceived

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the highest admiration; so it was not strange that Saint-Maurice should be one of the very first to hear of the Natchez expedition.

After listening to de Richebourg's frank discussion with Bienville, Saint-Maurice carefully considered the whole matter. He had no command here in the colony, nothing but an irritating stock of idleness and impatience. For the second time he was an outcast from France, and it mattered little whether he should ever return. Julie had held him at such a distance that he was convinced she had long since forgotten her girlhood's love. Even if she had not, he was now a disgraced man, and his pride would not allow him to speak to her of such a matter.

This expedition of Bienville's promised action—quick, virile, enticing; the danger of it gave a newer charm, for he would not have time to think. His reckless years in the East had left him with a ravening thirst for adventure on its own account. So his decision was quickly reached.

The next morning he went straight to Bienville.

"I have been thinking it over, and if you permit, I will accompany your expedition as a volunteer."

"But, my dear fellow," replied Bienville, deeply touched by this act of courageous friendship, "you do not know what you are doing. We shall almost certainly fail—be killed; or worse, be taken, perhaps tortured." Saint-Maurice did not flinch; he merely smiled.

"There is no reason why I should not go," he answered; "my people—" but he never finished the sentence which his whole demeanor so unmistakably suggested.

"As you will," responded Bienville. Such men as Crenan, gentlemen outcasts, had been in America before. He knew the type well. He knew, too, that they wanted no effusive thanks.

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"But," Crenan continued, "do not mention this to any one. The governor might order me to remain, and I prefer not to bring about a direct disregard of his authority."

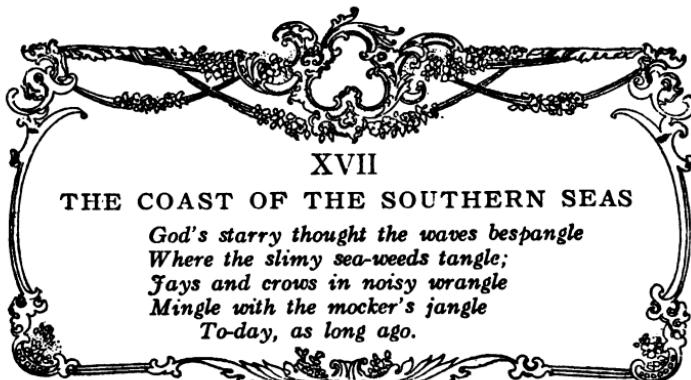
Bienville looked keenly upon Crenan, and wondered what this man could be who spoke so naturally the language of one accustomed to do as he chose and ask permission of none.

The cool-headed commander at first even doubted the wisdom of having an independent free-lance with him. His own discipline was adamant. But experience, and a shrewd insight into men, taught him that gentlemen, once voluntarily enrolled, held themselves more amenable to a rigid discipline than those less nobly born.

Late the same afternoon the little army, thirty-two men and fifteen boatmen, moved westward towards the great river. Ernest Crenan's heart was light; the time for action had come. The exile looked back without a tremor of regret upon the island which had been his prison—the sandy torture-chamber where he had been forced to brood so long in idleness.

Ahead lay the mysterious river, new peoples, and the savagery of the forest—surely in all of this he could for a time forget.





XVII

THE COAST OF THE SOUTHERN SEAS

*God's starry thought the waves bespangle
Where the slimy sea-weeds tangle;
Jays and crows in noisy wrangle
Mingle with the mocker's jangle
To-day, as long ago.*

FOR ages upon top of changeless ages the same islands had raised their piny crests above the same uncertain, freakish waves. Whimsical, playful, fretful, or frolicsome, the self-same waves for countless strings of passing lives had lavished their love or foamed their fury upon the self-same sands.

Some three weeks after Saint-Maurice had departed with Bienville's expedition the *Baron de la Fosse* came to anchor in the harbor at Massacre Island.

From her broad, white deck Julie and Sister Katherine, Malcolm and Gaston, and all the ship's company, looked out upon the virgin land which held its alluring bosom fair and bare before them. And a goodly sight it was, after their tedious weeks of ship-board prison life.

Cadillac, too, eagerly expecting fresh supplies, arms, reinforcements, miners, despatches, everything of which he stood in need, kept his watchers constantly

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alert to sight the long-expected ship. When her huge, white sails, however, began to pile their welcome pyramids above the sea, so great a man as Cadillac must show a becoming dignity. Children become impatient, not governors.

Crozat had instructed the captain of the *Baron de la Fosse* to send first a single boat ashore with despatches to Cadillac, and then to wait at anchor one full day before he allowed any one else to land. And so Cadillac withheld his orders for unloading, while those upon the vessel fumed and fretted out their twenty-four hours' detention. This was to give Saint-Maurice time to leave the coast, but he had already been gone for three eventful weeks.

First to come ashore the following morning were Gaston and Malcolm, for by Crozat's orders all consideration must be shown them. In their boat, too, came Sister Katherine, who was in charge of the emigrant women.

Julie, consistent with her supposed business, remained upon the ship to see the girls well off, while Sister Katherine received them, boat by boat, at the water-line.

The day was a scorching one in June, when the fresh, young summer blazed out, glorying as a vigorous lad might glory in his new-found strength. Yet, with the sweetness of good-natured youth, it tempered its fire by a cool breeze from the south.

The hot sands glared at the sea; the sea writhed, and crawled, and simmered on the sands.

Gaston and Malcolm paused at the beach to watch the slow unloading, and to gaze in curiosity upon their new surroundings.

There were the Indians, lying and squatting around; the black slaves, up to their waists in water, drawing the boats ashore; the Canadian *coureurs des bois*, in skins and fringes—a new people in a new land.

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They were standing, looking on at the unloading of the boats. Gallant and *coureurs des bois*, negro slave and Indian warrior alike, viewed with intense interest the landing of the girls. All the girls had been reviewed in turn, as boat by boat they cast loose from the ship and came crunching up the wet, firm sands. Julie, in a demurely dignified way, took her seat in the last boat with Nicolette, after having seen all the other women into the boats. Malcolm and Gaston met her at the shore, and conducted her safely to the little cabin which was set apart for herself and Sister Katherine. Then they strolled about and began to look around them, Malcolm hoping to see Saint-Maurice; certainly in so small a community they should have no trouble to find him.

Malcolm did not desire to begin inquiries at once, for that might direct attention to the purpose of their visit, and perhaps place Saint-Maurice upon his guard. But Gaston knew that in all likelihood César had gone.

When she landed, Julie glanced anxiously in every direction, half hoping, half fearing to see the man whose very presence here would be a confession of his dishonor.

Malcolm and Gaston speedily became acquainted with the frank and friendly colonial officers, and then sought to turn the conversation into a channel which would give them some information concerning Saint-Maurice. An accidental question when they were alone with Duclos, the King's commissary, did it.

"Is not Monsieur de Bienville with the colony?" Malcolm asked. "We hear much of his valor even in France."

Malcolm did not know it, but he had touched upon a subject tacitly forbidden in the colony. Since Bienville's departure, not a word had been heard from him directly. All sorts of conflicting stories had come back

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through various Indian channels, none of which were to be relied on. Some ran that the Natchez had slaughtered the whole expedition; a straggling Choctaw asserted that "the governor"—as the Indians persisted in calling Bienville—had gained a desperate battle, and that the Great Sun of the Natchez was his prisoner. If Cadillac had any more accurate information he kept it to himself. To those foolish ones who inquired he returned curt, often abusive, answers. So no one talked of the matter.

Cadillac became seriously alarmed. His latest letters from Crozat contained more urgent orders for the care of that young Captain Crenan who had slipped away with Bienville. And Cadillac believed it was all his post was worth to let him come to harm.

For these reasons, Duclos, being a cautious man, though a warm friend to Bienville, paused before replying to Malcolm's question. Malcolm continued:

"I have some curiosity to see Bienville; we hear such differing reports of him, except as to his valor. Is he not with the colony?"

"Yes, but he is now absent on an expedition."

The new arrivals had a natural interest in soldiers' work. Not knowing they were on delicate ground, they questioned Duclos.

"What expedition?" asked Malcolm.

"Against the Natchez."

"With what result?"

"We do not know; have heard nothing from him."

"How long has he been gone?" Malcolm seemed blind to Duclos' reluctance.

"Three weeks the day before yesterday."

"And you have no report?"

"Only the merest rumors."

"What force has he?"

"Thirty-two men—thirty-three, counting young

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Captain Crenan, who volunteered to go." Gaston knew this was the name Saint-Maurice bore, so he asked, hastily:

"In what force are the Natchez?"

"Some eight hundred valiant fighting men, the best on the continent."

"How are they armed?"

"Many with fairly good French and English guns. Others with knives and bows."

"Men of courage?"

"Absolutely fearless."

"I thought Bienville a more cautious general. Why should he go?"

Duclos shrugged his shoulders and did not reply.

"He must be a brave man?" Malcolm took up the questioning.

"As ever lived," responded Duclos, almost with reverence.

"Are you not alarmed?"

"Alarmed? Yes, we fear the worst has happened."

"Has there been no aid sent him?" Malcolm was pressing him.

"None."

"Why?"

Duclos merely shrugged his shoulders again. "You must ask the governor," and Duclos earnestly hoped they *would* ask the governor.

Recurring to his own line of thought, Malcolm inquired again: "Who is this young Crenan of whom you spoke? Has he any command?"

Duclos loosened his prudent tongue somewhat. "None; he simply volunteered to go, and went without the governor's knowledge. Cadillac was greatly annoyed and disturbed when he found Crenan had gone. Sent a courier to recall him immediately, but the courier never came back."

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"Monsieur Duclos, this Captain Crenan—you know him?" Malcolm persisted.

"Yes," answered Duclos, seeing now that they were not talking at random.

"What does he look like?"

"Slender, black-haired, tall—"

"With a white streak in his hair?" interrupted Malcolm.

"Yes, and—"

"That's Saint-Maurice," ejaculated Malcolm and Gaston together, for their friend's peril made them both forget all of Crozat's injunctions.

"We must do something, Gaston," Malcolm blurted out.

Even Gaston now became desperately interested in an inquiry which before he had only waited an opportunity to misdirect or stifle.

"Come to my room," Duclos urged. They followed him and had a long consultation, in which the commissary gave them very freely all he knew. It was bad enough.

Then Gaston and Malcolm drifted about the place alone and talked it over. They must wait until they saw the governor before any definite plan could be made.

Cadillac had an excellent reason for postponing his interview with these new-comers. His despatches from Crozat would give him detailed information concerning every person on board the ship, and he was anxious to read them at leisure.

Crozat's first letter to Cadillac contained an inclosure for Captain Crenan, with instructions for instant delivery—a thing now impossible. The wily governor opened it, read, and resealed it. He was sorely troubled. While he could not know exactly what the letter to Crenan meant, he understood that Crenan was a person of the greatest importance to Crozat.

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And now came the information that these two strangers, one of whom was a young man very close to Crozat, would inquire of him concerning Captain Crenan. They were to be treated with great consideration, but in no event was Crenan to be allowed to return to France.

Every letter they wrote must be forwarded direct to Crozat, no matter to whom addressed. Cadillac read these orders many times. They were so explicit no child could fail to comprehend, so peremptory no officer would dare to disobey.

The strange lady, Mademoiselle de Severac, whose presence seemed absolutely useless, must be most carefully shielded, housed with his own daughter and Sister Katherine, and treated with the utmost deference. All of this made Cadillac rabidly curious.

So when Gaston and Malcolm came to the governor's quarters that afternoon they were impressively received.

The tall, loose-jointed form of Cadillac stalked itself forward with slow and amiable condescension. He greeted them most cordially, and craved the grace of reading their letters, for Cadillac, too, was wily, and wanted to know all sides.

Cadillac read the letters and grew nervous, for he knew what was coming.

"By-the-way," said Malcolm, coming out bluntly with their real object, "I hear there is a young Captain Crenan in the colony, who is a good officer and has no command."

"Yes," replied Cadillac, "there is such a gentleman, but he has gone with Bienville."

"When will he return?"

This was exactly what Cadillac would give a great deal to know, so he answered: "I could not tell you; they have been gone for several weeks."

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"Where is Bienville, may I inquire?" asked Malcolm.

"At last advices he was on the river, near the Natchez country; we have nothing late from him." Cadillac did not like this questioning, but he could not show resentment.

"Has any relief been sent him?" Gaston asked, and Gaston stood too close to Crozat for the governor to snap him short.

"None as yet; my garrison here is very weak, and I have news of Indian designs against us."

"But young Crenan is our friend—" Malcolm came straight to the pith of the matter—"and we desire to know what has become of him. Why can we not get together men enough to go and make a search?"

Cadillac averted his eyes uneasily, for Malcolm seemed so earnest and determined. Gaston agreed with Malcolm that concealment was useless. If Saint-Maurice should really be in such imminent danger, their first duty would be to aid him; all else could come afterwards.

"Governor," said Gaston, "a part of our business here concerns this Captain Crenan, who is a man of importance. With your consent we would gladly undertake to fetch you news of him—and the expedition."

Distasteful as all this was to Cadillac, he was not sure enough of his ground to dare offend these two young men who had been so strongly commended to him. After a half-hour's discussion they succeeded in wringing from the governor authority to organize a relief party.

They left the governor to put their plan into instant effect. Duclos was hurriedly consulted, for he showed most decided interest. Boisbriant, a cousin, and Serigny, a brother of Bienville, took active steps to aid them.

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"Get l'Enfant," Serigny advised, "by all means; he is the most capable scout and boatman in the province. He lives in that small cabin yonder," pointing across the bay. "Lebas here is his partner; he will take you over."

Gaston and Duclos were busily gathering arms and provisions while Malcolm went with Lebas.

At the water-side Malcolm saw no boat, only what appeared to be a scooped-out log with an impudent-looking snub-nose. He looked inquiringly at Lebas.

"This is our boat, m'sieu," the courier replied.

Malcolm still was dubious, and went awkwardly about getting into so tricky a craft.

"Be careful, m'sieu, the boat overturns easily," Lebas cautioned him. "Sit down flat in the bottom —so—and do not stir." Verily, it was like balancing on a slack-rope. But they got over safe to l'Enfant's cabin.

In front of l'Enfant's little one-room cabin, chinked with mud, a rough, wooden bench ran on either side of the door.

Upon one of these benches sat a huge, loose-limbed white man, or one who had once been white, now a dingy, sun-burned brown. He was clad in skins, wore a long, reddish, Canadian beard, and a queer cap of gray fur on his head. This cap dangled a long, fluffy tail, white and gray ringed, behind his back.

The man came forward solemnly to meet Lebas, with a very decided annoyance of manner, and little or no curiosity towards the stranger. His frame was broad, muscular, and powerful, a pair of bow-legs giving a rolling, animal-like appearance to his gait. Malcolm smiled at the humor which dubbed this great, lumbering fellow "l'Enfant."

But l'Enfant evidently was not happy. Some shadow came between him and the sunshine. Beside him,

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on the bench, sat an Indian, a rather intelligent-looking fellow, his eyes bent on the ground, and who looked as if he had not spoken a word for hours—glum and discontented and sulky. Lying, squatting, and sitting about him, their attitudes expressing all degrees of lazy nonchalance, were some half a dozen others, young bucks all—stolid, silent, apparently inattentive, but letting nothing escape. In the rear a young and rather handsome Indian woman mechanically pounded the corn, and paid not the slightest heed to what went on. She was singing softly to herself, the only sound that arose in or about the cabin. And she it was who made l'Enfant weary of living.

"L'Enfant, governor wants you very quick," Lebas told him.

L'Enfant threw a look of intense disgust at the Indians, and mumbled something about having a family matter to settle.

Malcolm, forgetting the time-old adage about meddling in family affairs, asked him what the trouble was. The courier was not reticent or sensitive about his domestic broils, so he came out squarely with them.

"See woman yonder? I bought her for wife six or seven months ago—gave three hatchet and very good gun for her, too. That is her brother, Sassa, sitting there by the door.

"She has many brothers, and cousins, and friends, hungry like locusts. When I make good hunt, all come to see me, and lie around that way—as you see—until all is eaten up. Indian not hunt while his friend has anything to eat.

"That is their way, m'sieu. I do not blame her; she know nothing else but to give while it lasts, give freely of all I kill, to whoever comes. Keep me in the woods all the time, not get any rest.

"So I tell her brother. 'Take sister to lodge again';

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he say, 'All right'; I say, 'Then give back one hatchet and gun I give you'; he say, 'No'; I say, 'Two hatchet quite enough; not long time'; he say, 'No, if we take sister back, must have one more hatchet, two knife, can of powder, one jug fire-water'; I say, 'No, no, no.' He say, 'Very well. You good hunter. We quite satisfied, glad like it is.' Do they not look satisfied, m'sieu?" and he pointed a disgusted finger at the idle, greasy Indians lounging about the place.

"Now no meat in house; no corn in field. They eat what she pounding, eat all up to-night. See, m'sieu, a man's family bring him into much troubles."

Malcolm could not restrain his amusement at the other's unique dilemma. Time was pressing, though, and he needed the man at once. He asked:

"Can you give Sassa these things which he demands?"

L'Enfant threw his hairy arms wide apart to show their utter emptiness; as he did so, Malcolm could not but notice the magnificent breadth of chest the fellow carried.

"How can I, m'sieu? I am not made of gold. I only have this. This good at commissary for gun and can of powder."

As he spoke, he drew from the folds of his shirt a long bunch of hair, decorated with feathers, dyed red and yellow. He passed it to Malcolm, who handled it first with curiosity, then with ill-concealed repugnance.

"What is that?"

"Chickasaw scalp. I take him two weeks ago. They not know I got it," pointing to the savages, "or Sassa want gun."

Malcolm was curious, so he asked one more question.

"How is this—this thing—good for a gun and powder?"

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"Governor, he pay it; Chickasaw friend to Englishman; Frenchman pay gun for his scalp, gun and can of powder."

Verily, this was a queer warfare they waged in the West, but it did not concern Malcolm, so he pursued the matter he had in hand.

"Attend to me, l'Enfant. The governor sends to you for me. I need you six or seven days, with your boat, and four men—the governor says that is enough—to paddle. If I give these things to Sassa, will you go with me?"

The man's face lighted up at prospect of being so well quit of his worry.

"M'sieu is rich and good; I will serve him."

With ample resources at command, Gaston and Malcolm found no difficulty in fitting out their expedition. Their friends at Massacre Island selected six well-tried *courreurs des bois*, all ready to depart upon any errand at a moment's notice. They carried also two reliable Indians, a Houma and a renegade Natchez, who knew the country. These, with Malcolm and Gaston, brought the number of their party up to ten. They travelled in two pirogues.

"Five in each pirogue—good." L'Enfant commended the arrangement.

Little by little Julie had gathered a pretty clear idea of what was going on before they came to America. Some things she had learned from gossip, some from Crozat, some even from Andrea. She always listened to the men, Gaston and Malcolm, during the voyage, and several items she picked up from their conversation. And now, before they had gotten settled on the shore, came this sudden wild-goose chase into the very heart of a savage wilderness—a possibility they had not once considered during all of their long discus-

THE COAST OF THE SOUTHERN SEAS

sions. It all made Julie more than suspicious of the truth.

One of the Gray Sisters who had been long in the colony told Sister Katherine of the Bienville expedition, and mentioned Captain Crenan—a man with a white streak in his hair. This distinguishing mark always attracted even the most superficial glance. And Sister Katherine repeated it to Julie.

The thought had come to Julie so by degrees that it did not startle her when she became certain. But she slipped away to think.

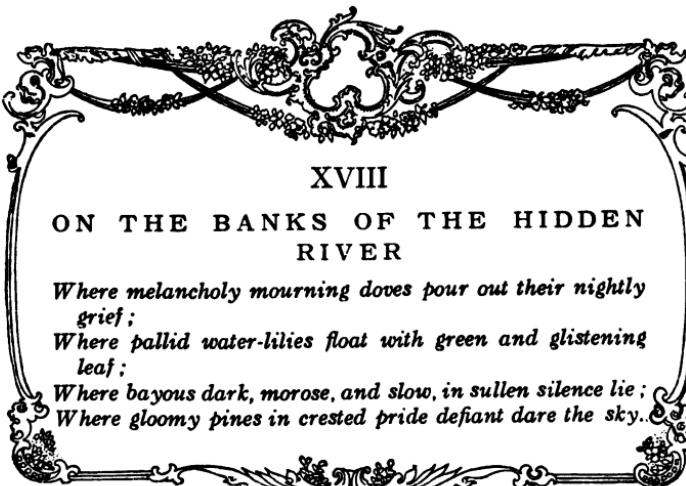
So it was true that Saint-Maurice had run away from the army and come to America; at this very moment he was with Bienville's men, who had not been heard from in many weeks.

Julie at first revelled in a swift, wild delight that he was not dead, and then—she closed her heart again to further searching and questioned herself no more.

When Malcolm and Gaston came to tell her they were going away for a few days, Julie willingly agreed; she even hastened them. She would be quite content to stay with Sister Katherine. Both the men thought it strange that the woman never once inquired the nature of their errand.

Yet she and Sister Katherine followed them anxiously to the water-side—yea, and farther; for Julie's eyes did not turn away so long as the trail of their canoes remained visible against the shimmering purple of the western horizon.





XVIII

ON THE BANKS OF THE HIDDEN RIVER

*Where melancholy mourning doves pour out their nightly
grief;*

*Where pallid water-lilies float with green and glistening
leaf;*

Where bayous dark, morose, and slow, in sullen silence lie;

Where gloomy pines in crested pride defiant dare the sky.

THE sun shone down from a cloudless heaven upon the open, unstirred waters. Playful little puffs of wind were only soft and sweet reminders of that mighty power which now sought adventure elsewhere, smote other seas from other skies, and drove its howling tempests upon other distant shores.

All who could, had come to the shore to bid the little force *bon voyage*, especially those officers who were friendly to Bienville. Many would have been glad to go, had the governor permitted. But there was no manifestation of anxiety—these provincials were made of sterner stuff.

Then the two canoes strung out, one behind the other, for a long voyage. The smaller one led, carrying five, with l'Enfant and Gaston. Lebas

THE BANKS OF THE HIDDEN RIVER

and Malcolm followed with three men in the second canoe.

There was no talking, no inclination for it.

Every man except the two Frenchmen stripped himself to the waist, and drove his paddle deep. The canoes bounded forward, the journey was begun. And they upon the shore wondered what the end would be. Those who went had other work than wondering.

The entire attention of the two Frenchmen, at first, was given to sitting straight in the middle of their treacherous crafts, for as l'Enfant had laughingly warned them, "Must part hair in middle to ride in pirogue." These boats were nothing more than long trees hollowed out by hatchet and fire, sharpened at the ends, until they were mere shells, round inside and out, drawing scarce three inches of water. The Indians swayed from side to side, their tireless muscles driving the narrow, slippery boats through waters which hardly rippled as they passed.

Hour after hour the long, low monotone of coast sped by, and by hard work they reached the neighborhood of Fort Biloxi in the night. There they rested, taking to their pirogues again long before the sun rose.

Malcolm was looking intently at an island to his left. He cried out that there was a large vessel anchored on the far side, he could see its spread of canvas. And it did look like a vessel, with peaks of white showing through the pine-tops. l'Enfant laughed, and called back:

"That no ship; it sand pile. Wind blow it about, sometime one place, sometime another; sometime covers trees up—all. That Cat Island. Great many cats, like this," and he touched his ring-tailed cap of gray and black; "I kill him there."

Leaving Cat Island far to the seaward in the rear,

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

they entered a broad, land-locked bay opening to the east. Some leagues farther, they wriggled through a tortuous pass, so narrow they could touch the reeds on either side, and debouched into a great, sheltered lake, fringed with a tall, waving marsh-grass, hiding thousands of those small, black ducks which come in summer. Shallow and protected from every wind, it lay perfectly still, and their unwearied boats flew along like fluttered sea-fowl frightened at the solemn quietude they invaded.

Late that night the voyagers camped at a small, cleared space which had apparently been used as a halting-place before. After the frugal meal, couriers and Indians were soon fast asleep, for this country was at peace, and no foes feared along these deserted marshes. But myriads upon myriads of swarming, stinging, buzzing, biting insects nettled the thinner-skinned men to desperation. No amount of fighting and brushing could drive them away. And everywhere one lighted he left an itching welt behind him.

The Frenchmen waked l'Enfant with their slapping about and vigorous swearing.

"Mosquito bite? Bad, eh?" he grunted.

"Bad? They are very devils from hell, and millions of them," growled Malcolm, thoroughly out of temper at his helplessness. Besides, he was sleepy.

"I stop him—some."

l'Enfant rose, gathered an armful of reeds and dry grass, and soon had a roaring fire. Upon top of that he threw some green stuff, which made a dense smoke. He then told Gaston and Malcolm to lie down on that side away from the wind beneath this rolling cloud. But it was intolerably hot. They complained again.

l'Enfant shrugged his shoulders.

"I do all I can. Sit away from fire; keep cool; mosquito eat up. Sit close up; much hot; no mosquito.

THE BANKS OF THE HIDDEN RIVER

M'sieu take what please him best." And he lay down again, utterly heedless of the swarming pests.

Malcolm looked enviously at the naked Indians and couriers, who slept so soundly. "Must have hides like a coat of mail," he grumbled.

Early the next day they had quite crossed the lake, and reached a clearly defined landing, whence a well-trodden path led off to the west through the woods.

"Portage," remarked l'Enfant, sententiously. "Two leagues across, come to river."

As men doing a well-accustomed thing, they unloaded their boats. The luggage was divided into packs, the canoes jerked out of the water, and they started across a narrow neck of land which divided the lake from the Hidden River. As they approached the river the land grew higher, and before either Gaston or Malcolm was aware the mighty river lay spread before their eyes.

Almost without a word they resumed their places in the pirogues and started on again. The Indians, habitually reticent, said nothing whatever, and the French were awed into complete silence by the matchless might of this monster stream.

They judged that a hundred Seines might have flowed along its channel.

It seemed to have no clearly defined banks, for there were great trees growing far out into the water. But where the strongest currents ran, the way was open like any other stream, open and marked by huge eddies and long tracks of yellow bubbles, smooth, shining places, and great rafts of matted drift.

"Water heap high," Lebas remarked to Malcolm. "Come up heap fast."

All of that day, and others like it, they toiled with the swift and vacillating currents, forcing their boats oftentimes straight across the most turbulent places

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in order to reach the long stretches of quiet water. Sometimes, too, they caught powerful reflex eddies which bore them swiftly up the stream.

L'Enfant ran his boat ashore, Lebas following.

"Do we leave the river here?" Malcolm questioned.

"No; portage; river yonder again, cut across, save seven league."

The light craft were carried a hundred yards and launched into the river again, perhaps seven good leagues above.

And then for miles and miles their way would lead through dense, cool forest glades, in placid water, where the tree-boughs mingled with the flood.

"Heap easy paddle in here—cool, too," Lebas said. "See how fast he run out yonder," Lebas pointed to mid-stream, where the drift rushed by as in a mill-race. So they kept beneath the trees.

For the first day or two they travelled by day and took their rest at night. Malcolm began to complain a little of the intense heat, said it gave him a strange, confused feeling in the head.

"Head come all right again when get in shade," l'Enfant assured him.

When hills began to appear on the right bank, l'Enfant kept well to the left. "Cenis over there"—he pointed to the west—"friends. Natchez there on the bluffs—enemies." Then they travelled altogether at night. "Natchez runners watch river," l'Enfant explained.

During one of their halts for rest, l'Enfant walked half a league inland to a village he knew. When he came back he told Gaston and Malcolm:

"Indian say governor on Tunica Island, by Natchez and Tunica nation. Think have great fight, not sure. Many Natchez, great heap." They started on again more cautiously, for they were not more than two days' journey from Tunica Island.

THE BANKS OF THE HIDDEN RIVER

Two more days of sun and water and toil, the same unvarying densities on either side, the same tortuous channel and turbid pools of whirling yellow.

It was early in the night, that first intense darkness of a semi-tropic land. L'Enfant's canoe dropped back beside the one which carried Malcolm.

"Think that must be Governor Bienville," and he pointed to a wriggling glimmer of faintest light, which tipped here and there a tiny wave. "That Tunica Island yonder."

By straining his eyes Malcolm could barely discern a cloud of darker gloom ahead.

"Not so sure, must find out; Natchez great tribe, in here all place. Wise old chief. Come." He led them towards the western bank, where he left the other canoe moored fast beside a huge sycamore-tree whose tall, white trunk would guide him to it again. He put the others out of his boat and held one paddle alone.

"Stay here; I go ahead. After while come back." And though they watched him as he left, in a moment they could neither see him nor hear the dip of his paddle.

For some short space they waited; then there came the cry of a night bird from the direction of the island—one of the most usual of the river sounds. It was repeated several times. The courier next to Malcolm nudged him. "L'Enfant." Soon there was another noise, the like of which Malcolm had never heard. The courier laughed.

"It very well. That Horn Moon."

"Who?"

"Horn Moon; he courier with Bienville—friend to l'Enfant."

Almost as they talked, a dim, spectral shape seemed to spring, like an evil genius, out of the water.

"Come," the spectre said, and they followed l'Enfant

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

towards the island. As they drew near to the bushes, l'Enfant repeated his singular cry, more boldly this time. It startled both the Frenchmen, who could scarcely believe so wild a sound came from a human throat. L'Enfant returned the answer, scarcely disguised, and, without hesitation or concealment, headed his canoe straight for the dark mass looming up just before them.

The water now shallowed very rapidly, and the bottom of the pirogues began to scratch against the canes and brush.

"Water very high. Most cover island up."

The quick challenge came, "*Qui vive?*" and l'Enfant answered, "Frenchmen—friends." Nevertheless when they sprang out in the water and slush, a dozen rifles were levelled on them. "It's l'Enfant," came a voice from the shadows, and the rifles dropped.

It was a wretchedly dismal place to disembark, dark as the mouth of Erebus beneath these towering trees, the water from their ankles to their waists.

"This way, l'Enfant," called Horn Moon, and he guided them along a little ridge, until they came to somewhat higher ground. Here they were stopped by an officer, de Richebourg, who questioned briefly, "Whom have you here, l'Enfant?"

"Two gentlemen to see the governor."

"Who are they?"

Malcolm stepped forward. "We are lately arrived, and desire to see the governor."

"By my soul, gentlemen, your business must be urgent!"

"It is, but it can wait until morning if Monsieur de Bienville is asleep."

De Richebourg laughed. "Asleep? He never sleeps. You can see him now. Follow."

While de Richebourg was talking with Gaston, Mal-

THE BANKS OF THE HIDDEN RIVER

colm stood rather apart, looking into the camp, searching for something, he hardly knew what. He still felt somewhat confused and muddled in his head —unable to think clearly. When his eyes grew accustomed to the light, one by one he could descry dim figures on the ground. Gradually there was one among them all which fixed and held his attention. A man, half reclining upon a fallen tree, his face in profile showing in the glow from the smouldering fire at his feet—a man, wholly inattentive to his surroundings, clad in ordinary captain's uniform of the French army.

This was the first time Malcolm had seen Saint-Maurice since—since Andrea had told him.

De Richebourg and Gaston had gone ahead. Malcolm stood like a panther hidden in the dark, his eyes, as glitteringly bright, intently regarding Saint-Maurice, the man who barred his way to every hope of earthly happiness.

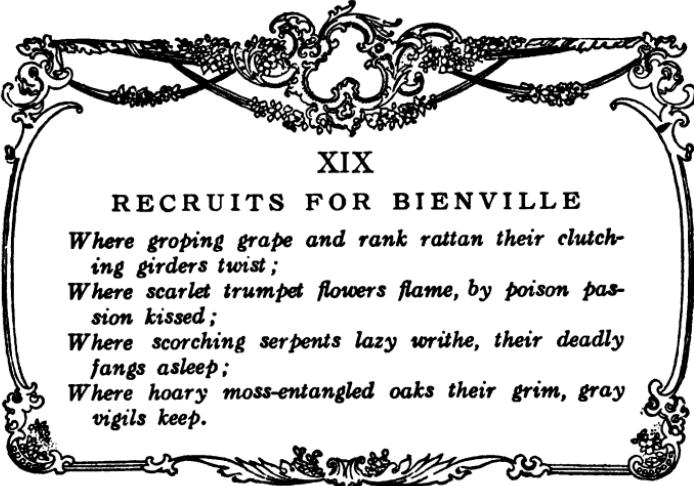
Every ardent desire he had beaten down upon the banks of the Seine sprang up again, to confront him in the Mississippi forests. All about him rose the steaming odors of hot earth and trickling waters; a fierce, sensuous, savage irresponsibility trembled in the controlless passions of the night. And Malcolm's soul quivered with the pent-up impulses of a tiger hatred. He stood there, like some wild thing of evil, glaring upon its enemy who slept.

"Malcolm, come on," called Gaston.

He started, as if ashamed to be detected in the treason of his momentary thought, for the passion vanished swiftly as it came.

Once more his own nobler self, Lautrec stepped within the dim circle of light and entered Bienville's camp.

And Saint-Maurice, ignorant of the influence which, vacillating between good and ill, then stepped into his life, did not lift his head from the fire.



XIX

RECRUITS FOR BIENVILLE

*Where groping grape and rank rattan their clutching girders twist;
Where scarlet trumpet flowers flame, by poison passion kissed;
Where scorching serpents lazy wrethe, their deadly fangs asleep;
Where hoary moss-entangled oaks their grim, gray vigils keep.*

DE RICHEBOURG led the way towards the rough stockade in which Bienville had made his quarters. The two men glanced round the camp with the intelligent observation of eyes practised in military strategy.

Possibly half a dozen soldiers were in view, but it took a keener sight to see the others. Of these half-dozen, Saint-Maurice was the most prominently visible, because, perhaps, the habit of caution was not yet developed in him. The fires, banked low, gave but little light.

No sentry could be seen; yet not a sound of the night escaped those watchful couriers concealed along the edges of the camp.

Those not on watch rested serenely, for they well

RECRUITS FOR BIENVILLE

knew that the tireless man in yonder tent thought for them while they slept. They were well content to be the arms and sinews of any enterprise whereof Jean Baptiste le Moyne de Bienville, of cautious brain and watchful eye, laid out the work for them to do.

Bienville had thrown his stockade about a fallen oak, hewing off a level space along its trunk to serve him as a table. Over this he had stretched a piece of sail-cloth to make it smooth. He studied at his maps, and turned occasionally to ask some question of an Indian who squatted by his side. This man answered in monosyllables, briefly, directly, and concisely. Bienville did not doubt him, for long years of strenuous service had proven Nika's loyalty on too many hunts and too many fiercely waged fights.

The crude drawing, upon which the governor's finger rested, showed the windings of the river, from the country of the Chickasaws down to the Gulf.

It was not of these vast reaches that Bienville thought. His business was here, desperately close at hand, and he must of sheerest necessity succeed. As he pondered, his finger finally returned to and abided upon an island rather larger than the rest, perhaps ten leagues above the one marked "Tunicas" on his drawing.

"Here," he said to himself, "seems the highest point near enough to serve." For the water had risen so rapidly at this totally unexpected season, that he feared it would drive him to find newer quarters above the flood.

"Large trees on this next island up the river, are there not, Nika?" he asked, in a louder tone.

"Big a plenty; great many."

"Good for stockade?"

"So big," replied Nika, indicating different sizes, from that of his leg to several times the girth of his

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body. "River run through, cut him off from that side," the Indian continued, pointing to the west. This was to explain to Bienville that the island was not one of those recently thrown up by the river, on which the wood was very small.

"Yes, as I thought," mused Bienville. "Plenty willow and cane?"

"Great heap," Nika responded.

"It is high?" he queried again.

"Too high for big water."

"It will probably serve," Bienville thought to himself, and was giving his attention to other affairs when de Richebourg entered, Gaston following close behind him with Malcolm.

Bienville was so engrossed with his plans that he did not immediately give heed, so the two strangers had a moment's opportunity to study that redoubtable warrior about whom such widely conflicting stories passed current in France.

It was hard to guess, at a glance, of what age man he was. As he sat there beside his roughly improvised military table, poring over the maps, hard lines of abstraction and thought gave him the appearance of considerable age.

The face seemed rather square, with broad and noble forehead, a jaw of welded iron, and a chin running down to somewhat of a point. The lips were clean-shaven, thin, even cruel now in their expression of concentrated will.

When he raised his eyes, at touch of the crouching Nika, and they fell upon de Richebourg, it was simply a glance of composed inquiry—the military chieftain towards his subordinate. Further than this, friend to friend, man to man, there was nothing. But his view, passing beyond de Richebourg, pierced the darkness to the strangers, and he arose.

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"Governor," said de Richebourg, "here are two gentlemen who would speak with you." Discerning them instantly as men of rank, Bienville came forward frankly, while de Richebourg presented them by name.

There was a great change in the man. The smiling lips seemed not so cruel, nor so harsh; the large eyes lighted up in cordial greeting, and the warm hand of a polished gentleman gave a prince's welcome among his woodland retinue.

After a very few words, Gaston presented the letter they had brought with instructions from Cadillac. Bienville read it. "You gentlemen are in Louisiana to look after certain mining interests of the Marquis du Chatel, and desire to see Captain Crenan?" He glanced up pleasantly.

Malcolm bowed; he did not relish this double-dealing and evasion.

"Nika, call Captain Crenan," Bienville commanded, and the Indian disappeared before Malcolm or Gaston could protest.

"I am quite glad," continued Bienville, "that Captain Crenan is to return. He seems a man of courage, but unused to this style of warfare. I have taken a great liking to him, and infinitely prefer he should not remain with me. He came voluntarily, and holds no responsibility or command."

Observing the look of inquiring interest which Gaston and Malcolm could not conceal, Bienville even went further. "This is a dangerous expedition, and I do not care to expose any man whose duty does not force him."

Now they heard a man coming outside, with heavy tread. Nika's moccasins made no noise.

First Nika, then Saint-Maurice, came within the stockade. Saint-Maurice saw them for some little distance. He paused and hung back, startled and sur-

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prised. After a moment's indecision he came on resolutely.

Then Bienville presented the gentlemen. Saint-Maurice showed no sign of recognition.

“Captain Crenan?” Malcolm half acknowledged, half inquired, with an interrogative inflection.

“Captain Crenan,” replied Saint-Maurice, in so decided a tone it left no room for discussion. Gaston, catching the drift, responded in most ordinary and courteous salutation.

There was a distinct sense of discomfort to them all until Bienville relieved it by suggesting:

“Captain Crenan, these gentlemen bear despatches from the governor, which request me to release you from your service here and permit you to return at once to Massacre Island with them.”

Bienville, noting their embarrassment, and thinking their business might be personal, remarked:

“You gentlemen can walk out and talk over your affairs. I will await your decision.”

Saint-Maurice still said nothing. He led the two other silent men out into the darkness to the fire where Malcolm had seen him lying. He did not wait to be questioned, but turned upon them and asked:

“Malcolm, why are you and Gaston here in this devil-stew? Looking for me?”

Gaston and Malcolm shifted about. On the instant, neither replied. They both knew Saint-Maurice would believe no idle story about mines, and they lacked effrontery to tell it. In fact, the stress of events had been such as to totally drive the fine tale they had arranged completely from their memory.

“Why do you not tell me straight out? What do you want?”

Uncertain where his sentence would end, Malcolm began:

RECRUITS FOR BIENVILLE

“César—”

“*Captain Crenan*,” he corrected, emphatically, yet without heat. “I am *Captain Crenan* in America.”

“Of what command *in France*?” asked Malcolm, with a strong inflection on the “*in France*,” simply to show Saint-Maurice that his position was vulnerable to the lightest breath of suspicion or the idlest inquiry. The man flushed scarlet.

“I crave your pardon, Malcolm, and yours, Gaston, for I know your mission is a friendly one, however ill-advised.”

But the remark brought them all instantly face to face with their real situation. They talked—talked earnestly. Saint-Maurice asked many questions, answered few. Two men only talked, for Malcolm now sat in absolute silence.

Suddenly, without any warning, Gaston burst into a laugh, so loud and unrestrained as to attract attention of those about him, the two Indians, especially, looking askance at so much needless noise.

“What is so amusing to you, Gaston?” Saint-Maurice asked.

“I was laughing at Malcolm and myself; there he sits, a mumbling monument of discontent, looking precisely as I feel—stupid, and disgusted with himself.”

“For what?” Saint-Maurice asked.

Malcolm still held his brooding peace.

“We might as well make a clean breast of our scheme,” laughed Gaston. “Here we two have plotted and planned, and fixed up a story by which we hoped to find out why you left France as you did, and to take you back. We were to be so exceedingly clever and discreet about it all. Now, after a half-hour, these brilliant conspirators have told you all they know and learned nothing. Crozat said there was no use in our

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coming; he could manage it better. I believe Crozat in Paris could do more than we can here."

Saint-Maurice smiled. "Good old Uncle Antoine," he thought, "how true and faithful he is! He tried to save me even this well-meant and friendly annoyance."

Saint-Maurice talked with them in more reasonable spirit, yet he did not forget the caution of Uncle Antoine.

"Our situation here is very precarious at present," Saint-Maurice was saying, "and I could not think of leaving Bienville now. But, if we are fortunate, I can go back to Massacre Island with you in a very few days. Meanwhile" — and Saint-Maurice grew exceedingly earnest about this—"I shall insist upon your returning immediately. I cannot permit you to remain in such a trap as this on my account." The two men merely laughed at him; it was their only reply to his command that they seek their own safety.

"Then you think you can go back with us in a few days?" Malcolm asked.

"Yes," Saint-Maurice replied; "certainly in a week. I am heartily sick of all this sun and water."

"But how about Julie?" Gaston suggested to Malcolm. "I hate to leave her alone for any length of time."

"Julie?" queried Saint-Maurice, incredulously. "Julie? What of her?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle de Severac," Gaston replied; "she came over with us."

"What!" Saint-Maurice sprang up and stared at the two men. "What! Julie? Here? In America?"

Gaston nodded.

"Came over with you?"

"Yes."

"Did she come for—" Saint-Maurice had almost

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demanded to know if Julie came on the same errand, but he stopped himself and asked, more quietly:

“Where is she now?”

“At Massacre Island.”

“What in Heaven’s name brought her here?”

“It is a long story,” Gaston answered, “but Malcolm can tell you more about it.”

Malcolm had been glumly wondering why Saint-Maurice should make such a fuss about Julie’s coming. But he was speedily compelled to answer questions shot at him. Finally, as a mere matter of self-protection, he detailed the whole circumstance of Julie’s flight from Paris, her chase by Francini, and Francini’s ignominious capture. Malcolm unconsciously gave to his narrative much of the coloring which he had gathered from the talk about the town, and the story sank deep into Saint-Maurice’s mind. During the recital it gradually became clear to Saint-Maurice that Julie’s presence in America had nothing whatever to do with himself—possibly she did not even know. So he only asked:

“Does she know I am here?”

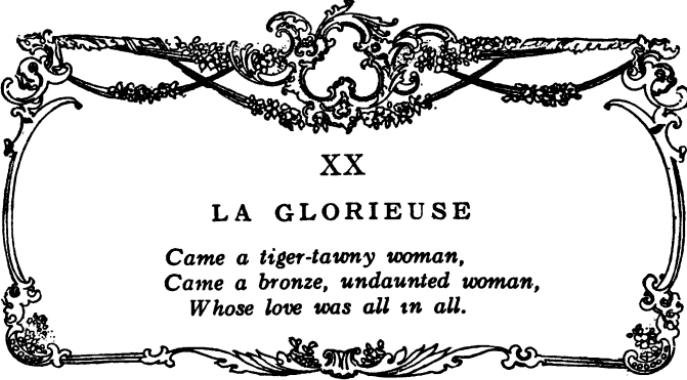
Gaston replied: “We have not spoken of it to her, but she suspects something—just how much, I cannot tell you.”

“Had she heard the gossip you spoke of—about myself?”

“Doubtless,” Gaston answered, regretfully; “all of Paris heard it.”

There was a long silence, when all three men gazed at the fading embers. Saint-Maurice finally rose.

“Come, gentlemen,” he said, “let us go back; Bienville is waiting. I retract my promise. Under no circumstances can I return to Massacre Island for the present.” With the finger of suspicion pointed at him, Saint-Maurice felt he could not look upon Julie’s face.



XX

LA GLORIEUSE

*Came a tiger-tawny woman,
Came a bronze, undaunted woman,
Whose love was all in all.*

BY early morning Gaston was out, looking about to see what manner of place this was he had stumbled into.

It seemed to be an island, nearly in the centre of the great river. Now the water almost covered it, running entirely across in many places. A small, irregular space of higher ground still held itself above the encroaching waves. Most of the straggling brush huts were knee-deep in water—a canoe could run directly into the doors. All approaches to the island had been cleared of undergrowth, for purposes of defence. There were three stoutly built stockades, and a central block-house. The trained soldier's eye observed all these keenly, as marking the kind of war which savage habits made it necessary to wage.

To the east, just shielding a rising sun, huge bluffs loomed up, gashed by ravines and crowned with gloomy verdure, solitary as nature made them. No Genesis yet had told the story of their creation.

LA GLORIEUSE

Storm-fearless oaks stood boldly on the battlements; magnolias of darker shining green flaunted their pure white cups nodding in the wind; the scarlet sumac, the golden browns of gum, and the fading yellow of last year's cane spattered and dashed the virgin landscape with infinite variety of color. Directly opposite him a great, tawny spot of earth along the hill-sides showed bare and blank where an enormous avalanche had fallen into the undermining flood.

Gaston turned his back upon the sun and looked across the yellow waters. But for the trees which indicated the farther shore, no shore-line could be seen, for the waters glanced and glimmered beneath and beyond the trees.

Far as his glorying eyes could reach, the land lay fair and warm as a new-born thing unsullied from the Father's generous hand. So sweet and pure, that other eastern Eden might have welcomed the innocence of fledgling human souls. But here, as there, the serpent lurked, and danger crouched, and Cain strode sturdily abroad, unbranded of his God.

To the west, level as a floor for unmeasured stretches, the silent forest watched the white man come. So, silently, it had awed the Spanish chivalry, racked with fever and wretched with their wounds; so it had witnessed them, weak and dispirited, commit the stern De Soto to the river's eternal guardianship. So it had watched the red man prey with knife and axe and torture upon his brother in red, after the fashion of fallen men. So it watched, in years to come, the fleeing remnants of once mighty nations leave their homes to the east, cross its stolid Rubicon of fate, and, turning from the bones of their fathers, find death in newer forms among the cannibals of the plains.

For the river saw it all, the river knew it all, the river

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served all, the river devoured all, and the pitying river concealed it all.

Gaston stood awed by the misty immensities of water, plain, and hill. Men were not here—nothing but God.

He drank fresh invigoration from the morning, a fresher incense from the Morning Spirit.

The young Frenchman started from his reverie; Bienville had touched his arm. "Look at those bluffs; they seem lonely, do they not? There are not fewer than a hundred pairs of fierce black eyes glaring down upon us from the brush. I hold their chiefs in the stockade yonder, and the nation is excited. But they can do nothing without the Great Sun and the Serpent." Bienville smiled pleasantly, as if he had only spoken of holding prisoner some sweet-singing bird in a gilded cage.

"It does look lonely," he remarked simply to Gaston as he passed quietly along, making his morning round of camp, and keenly observing the water-marks which showed the river's steady rise. His face was grave and thoughtful again.

Gaston turned and made his way towards the cabin which he had seen Saint-Maurice enter the night before. The door stood open; its occupant was rising.

"Tell me, César, what has happened here? Bienville intimated to me just now that he had the Natchez chief, or king, whatever you call him, a prisoner on this island. How did you capture him? Have you fought a battle?"

Saint-Maurice laughed. "No, Bienville fights with his wits."

"Tell me about it," Gaston insisted, and sat down on a rough block which served Saint-Maurice in place of a chair, while the other went about his dressing. Saint-Maurice, glad enough to talk of something besides his own affairs, told Gaston briefly how they

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came to the island with thirty-three men; that Bienville had sent a courier up the river and posted notices on the trees warning all couriers that the Natchez had declared war, and Bienville was camped on Tunica's Island. This drew more than fifty of the best fighting men on the continent to their little army, for to these couriers Bienville's nod was the highest law they knew.

Bienville kept his reinforcements carefully concealed in the stockade. Then he invited the Natchez chiefs to a conference and feast. At first the wary chiefs would not come, but sent spies instead, whom Bienville dismissed — “A chief could smoke only with chiefs,” so Bienville said.

After two weeks of intense nervous strain, the chiefs came themselves to talk with the governor. His fifty couriers surrounded them and made all prisoners.

Bienville demanded reparation of them for the Frenchmen who had been slaughtered. He demanded the very heads of the murderers. He would not be content with their scalps, for he might be deceived.

The chiefs took several days to consider, and finally agreed to give up the guilty ones and to build a fort for the French on top of the bluff. There were four of these murderers among the prisoners — two common warriors whom Bienville shot at once, and two chiefs who were at this moment waiting execution. Three were still in the villages.

“But,” said the Great Sun to Bienville, “all of our chiefs are prisoners, and there is no man in the villages of sufficient authority to put these condemned ones to death. If Bienville will liberate the Serpent he will bring in the heads.”

“The Serpent, you know,” continued Saint-Maurice, “is their greatest warrior—if he were French, I would call him one of the most chivalric gentlemen I have ever known—and Bienville feared to let him go. But Bienville

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ville did consent to release the Little Sun, his brother. This is how the matter now stands. Little Sun has been gone for four days, and we are all exceedingly anxious to know what he is doing, whether he is preparing for an attack upon us or is really complying with Bienville's demands. He should have returned yesterday. If the Little Sun brings Bienville these heads, we will make a treaty; otherwise, I suppose we must fight. Meanwhile, this cursed water is rising so fast that it will drive us from the island. Bienville and the couriers say it has never before gone so high at this season. Half of our men are sick."

Saint-Maurice looked very grave, and Gaston remarked :

"It seems to me Bienville is in a desperate situation if the chiefs decline his terms."

"Trust Bienville for that," the other man replied. "Look out there, at those couriers; they do not seem to be alarmed." The hardy fellows were laughing over their rough-and-tumble sports, like huge brown bears at play.

"They've followed Bienville through too many close places to let this worry them. And do you know, Gaston"—Saint-Maurice laughed an infectious laugh—"I've imbibed the same blind confidence in that quiet man yonder."

Hurried steps splashed towards them from a near-by hut; de Richebourg stuck his head into their door and shouted :

"Come quick, Crenan. Little Sun is coming."

"What?"

"Little Sun is coming; hurry."

"One moment," and Saint-Maurice excitedly completed his half-hour's dressing in an instant. The three men walked swiftly to the usual landing-place.

Malcolm and Gaston had not had time to fully com-

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prehend the importance of Little Sun's mission, so they were more curious than anxious. Every idle man on the island hurried to the landing. Around the distant bend a single canoe had shot out from the cover and held its prow straight for Tunica. Stolidly as the couriers and soldiers observed it, they were keen to know what had transpired at the village. The long tension had told upon their nerves at last.

Nika touched de Richebourg's arm. "Governor want you," he said.

"Be back in a moment," said de Richebourg, and he hastened to Bienville.

Almost instantly de Richebourg returned, and ordered the men to scatter about the island at their usual occupations, not to show any interest in what went on.

"Bienville does not desire these Indians to think we are uneasy," he explained to Saint-Maurice.

The four men all strolled about together, keeping their eyes upon the growing speck on the water. L'Enfant and Big Pierre were standing quite near.

Very slowly the pirogue came on; it held five persons, four at the paddles and one standing erect in the centre. It was not a war-party, neither was it one of their chiefs. On and on it came, until l'Enfant remarked:

"That not Little Sun; that a woman," and turned his back, disgusted. The solitary figure, standing like a tree in the canoe, was, in fact, a woman. There was not much opportunity to speculate about this before de Richebourg and Big Pierre exclaimed, almost together, "La Glorieuse!" and l'Enfant added, "Coming to the Serpent."

"Who is she?" Malcolm inquired.

"The de Montespan of the Natchez," de Richebourg explained; "she is a woman of the Sun, and has always loved the Serpent; but the laws of the tribe forbid

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a chief of the Sun to marry a Sun woman. He loves her, yet, at the wish of his nation, has taken other wives. In all but the name, this *La Glorieuse* is his wife, and their nation is proud of it."

The Frenchmen were listening to de Richebourg, and watching the coming canoe with absorbing interest.

"She plans their wars and makes their treaties," de Richebourg continued; "has more influence with the tribes than any man among them, except the Serpent."

Big Pierre, who was scanning her intently, now said: "Black paint, thinks Serpent dead; will go long trail with him."

"What does he mean?" Saint-Maurice asked of de Richebourg.

"When a great chief dies," answered de Richebourg, "his wives and horses are killed to serve him on his path to the savage heaven, wherever that may be. See, all the upper part of that woman's face is painted black. Come, let us go down to receive her," and he beckoned to a few of the men to follow.

Grandly, imperiously as a forest Zenobia, caring not for gaudy robe or sparkling diadem to give her dignity, this half-naked savage woman kept her eyes straight before her, deigning not to look upon the common herd who gathered at the landing. It was said she never spoke to a Frenchman who was not a noble.

She bore the Great Sun tattooed on her breast, its counterpart on the round, firm-muscled hip, to set her apart as one of their deity's sacred family.

The prow of her boat touched the shore, and she stepped upon an out-reaching grassy mound. A slight inclination of the head dismissed her boatmen. Swiftly they departed, leaving her alone among her enemies.

Her hair, braided in its own raven glory, was guilt-

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less of any ornament. Her brave black eyes rested steadily upon the group in front as if to seek the very noblest out. There was no weakness of indecision, no strain of suffering in her delicate nostrils; nothing ruffled that clear-hewn brow, so disdainful of human emotions. Even the tiger-yellow undulation of her breasts, controlless traitors to a woman, betrayed no woman's fear.

"I seek your chief," she said, most calmly, and in excellent French.

De Richebourg stepped forward, with every gesture of profound respect. The slightest expression of recognition came into her eyes as she spoke.

"I will see—if you will—" and de Richebourg paused with his sentence unfinished, reluctant as he would be to ask a French princess of the blood to wait among the rabble. She glanced about her.

"I will see *your chief*; none other."

De Richebourg led her at once to Bienville.

The other gentlemen, with truest knightly instinct, refrained from following, and by example held back the curious who would run behind.

She paused at the door of Bienville's tent, while de Richebourg announced: "La Glorieuse."

Bienville admitted her without a semblance of surprise. The streak of black across her face told his quick eye what her errand was. Her voice, singularly low and sweet, yet strong and brave withal, gave the mission simply.

"I am told the Serpent has departed; his people mourn. It is not fitting that so great a warrior as he should have no serving-woman upon his journey. I am come. My people's laws have divided us in their villages, but the Great Father Sun will let me tread the sunset path beside him. If he be not yet gone, I can wait." And she seated herself upon the ground.

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Bienville came to raise her from the attitude of mourning, but she waved him off. "Profane not the dead of the Sun."

Bienville spoke to her respectfully.

"The Serpent is not dead; the Serpent is my brother. But justice knows not brother from stranger, friend from enemy. If the Serpent be guiltless of my people's blood, he has nothing to fear."

"The Serpent fears not," she proudly challenged. "The Serpent's hand falls heavily upon his enemy in battle; he is no assassin. He has no hatchet to strike a sleeping stranger in the dark. If *that* be your anger with the Serpent, why does he not return in peace to the villages of his people?"

Unconsciously, her loyal tongue spoke Bienville's thought, for he steadfastly believed the Serpent not the man to countenance a cowardly murder. But the governor's purpose lay deeper, and the Serpent was necessary to it.

Bienville did not deem it safe to let her see the Serpent, fearing that this fertile-minded, indomitable woman nurtured some desperate plan for his escape. Much would depend upon the return of the Little Sun and his success.

A comfortable lodging was assigned La Glorieuse, and some of her own people detailed to wait upon her, as became her rank.

Within an hour after the interview with La Glorieuse, Nika brought word to Bienville that the Stung Serpent was ill; the dampness and close confinement had thrown him into a fever.

Bienville sent for the Serpent. The tall, proud fellow tried bravely to cover the weakness of his gait, the unnatural excitement in his eyes, the heat of his brow.

The governor spoke affectionately.

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“My brother is ill?”

“No, it is the idleness; I am strong.” And he drew up his arm to gloat in its strength, but even as he did so the great, clammy drops stood out upon it. Bienville saw.

“I am the chief of my people”—Bienville addressed him kindly—“I must act for their good. I do not always order as I desire. It grieves my heart to see the Serpent ill. If I open the door for the Serpent, have I his promise he will not leave the island, and not communicate with his nation?”

Stung Serpent considered but made no reply. It might be a ruse to bind him to inactivity, in case of an attack.

Bienville pressed him. “Only until the Little Sun is come; we are waiting; nothing will be done. Your people wait; my people wait. Give me your word, my brother, only until the Little Sun returns.”

Stung Serpent knew Bienville’s words were true. All things would await the result of Little Sun’s mission. His health, too, was valuable. If he died, many useful braves and women would be strangled to bear him company to the spirit world, and this would considerably weaken the war-parties of his nation.

“My brother has the Serpent’s word; he will see nothing, say nothing; will stay.” And Stung Serpent turned to go, but Bienville had for the time forgotten.

“La Glorieuse is here—you will not see her.”

At sound of that name the self-contained chieftain raised his eyes till Bienville saw a gleam of manly happiness shining in them. They were different eyes from the cold, calculating ones which, until then, had only looked upon the tangled affairs of his tribe. Once or twice his lips moved, then he asked directly the question :

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"Will my brother tell me—why is La Glorieuse here? Her place is yonder, where the nation needs her counsel."

Bienville looked closely upon the chieftain:

"Word came to La Glorieuse that Stung Serpent had departed for the home of his fathers, upon the long sunset path—she is here to bear him company." The Serpent's proud breast quivered, his great heart struggled in its fevered prison. He folded his arms more firmly to hide the rank rebellion he could not quell.

With the air of a man for whom all ills had their holy compensations, he left the hut, a smile, dim and deep, beautifying the savage countenance.

For the Serpent was human, and he wore the universal human chain.

Outside Bienville's tent he paused and looked back. The guard stood ready to return him to the stockade. The governor caught the inquiry in the soldier's glance, and waved him away.

"Stung Serpent is free," was all Bienville said.

The soldier saluted and went again unquestioning to his post. Stung Serpent strode out into the open air, hampered only by his princely word.

All of this while Malcolm sat on a fallen log, near the water, looking out upon the bluffs.

The fiercest of human battles raged in his soul, the mad, passionate jealousy of a wholly tameless nature. He took no interest in what went on around him; merely drifted with the tide, and waited for whatever of good or evil he might be called upon to do.

Almost unconsciously, Malcolm watched the Stung Serpent leave Bienville's tent, walking with head down and features composed in deep meditation. Some hundred paces farther along the path stood La Glorieuse, her hands pressed in humility against her bosom, her eyes fixed upon the ground. She waited his com-

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mands. The Serpent did not even pause to look upon her. No greeting passed between them.

The daughter of the Sun had failed in nothing; she had done her full duty—coming to his side in the hour of death. But the exultant panther pride he felt, rejoiced in her woman's love—in the love of this superb creature, who meekly stood, proud of the very humility that she showed before her lord. Before none other, human or divine, did La Glorieuse lower the haughtiness of her flashing eye.

The Serpent paused; not a sign came from him which the white man could see.

Malcolm could not forbear to watch so strange a meeting; these two solitary figures upon the shore, not near enough to speak. The Serpent passed La Glorieuse.

Then he turned, came back along the path. La Glorieuse lifted her eyes a moment only to his; they met. She looked an instant towards the eastern shore, where lay the villages of her people. The Serpent made no visible gesture of command, yet, to her, no blaring trumpet did *his* commands require. She read her master's wishes, and she obeyed.

Few and scant were the trifles which might impede the easy movement of her limbs. An instant sufficed to shake these useless trappings from her. Before Malcolm could even guess her intent, she stood erect, wild and free, of brown, untrammelled limb, and plunged into the rushing current. With firm, strong stroke she held her way down and across the river, her sinuous body scarce differing in color from the water's golden tawniness.

Malcolm watched her until she passed from view, a mere struggling speck, leaving a troubled wake behind her.

The Serpent heard the splash, but did not turn his

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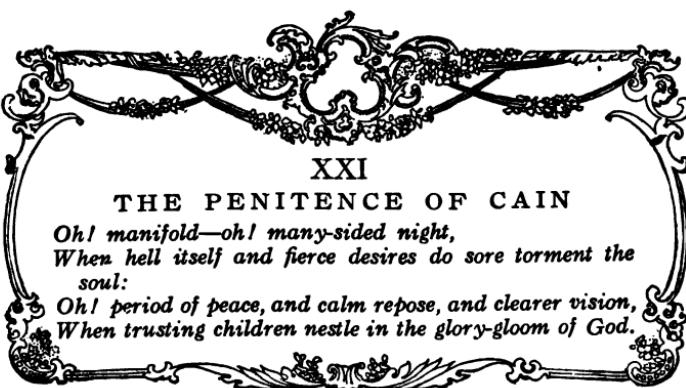
head. A listener close beside him might have detected a deeper breath or two, quickly controlled, but that was all.

By the corner of the block-house the Natchez chief-
tain turned. His keen eye caught the form of the
woman emerging upon the opposite shore. And the
Serpent smiled.

And Malcolm's lips borrowed a smile from his, a
smile of common human kinship with the Serpent.

Then Malcolm's lips grew hard and cold again as
another thought came to him. His hands were cold,
but brow and heart throbbed scorching hot.





XXI

THE PENITENCE OF CAIN

*Oh! manifold—oh! many-sided night,
When hell itself and fierce desires do sore torment the
soul:*

*Oh! period of peace, and calm repose, and clearer vision,
When trusting children nestle in the glory-gloom of God.*

MALCOLM had not risen from the log where he had watched the parting of La Glorieuse and the Serpent. Saint-Maurice tapped him on the shoulder.

“Come, Malcolm, the governor has assigned you to my cabin; I am glad to share it with you.”

“Thanks,” Malcolm answered, mechanically. “I will come in a short while.” And Saint-Maurice, noting his absent mood, walked away, leaving him sitting there, his eyes fixed upon the river. Malcolm turned to glare at him in hate as Saint-Maurice went slowly to his cabin.

There was a deadly fascination for Malcolm in that rushing flood out yonder. To his unused eyes, this insatiate monster of a stream, tearing down and building up again in wildest caprice, was a lawless thing of awe and wonderment. He was now watching it attack a great forest which stood on the western bank. The struggling currents, fighting with themselves,

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whirling and eddying in seething anger, charged the shore. They gnawed and dug away at the soft earth until huge trees fell as ripe wheat falls before the scythe. And the gulping, gurgling, frothy scum bubbled up where they vanished.

Lashed together as these trees were with vines, they clung tenaciously to the banks, like the rigging of a stricken ship clinging to the hulk. But the greedy river wrenched them loose and bore his spoils away. High above the taint and high above the ruin a submerged magnolia held her pure white children free from contamination—bore them aloft as did those frantic human mothers when God's rainy wrath deluged the sinful world.

If the river devoured here, it belched up yonder; if it destroyed lands and fields to the north, it replaced with newer, richer ones to the south. The river took away, the river gave again, all glory to the river.

Malcolm turned his eyes to watch a dead, gaunt tree-trunk, stripped of every leaf and twig, rear its ghostly skeleton bolt upright in the maelstrom. Down and down again it plunged to the very bottomless pit of waters, but, always erect, it sank and sank and sank. Then, bursting its shackles far beneath, it sprang up and up again, far above and out of the waters, as the climbing arrow flies. And there it rose and fell, a pinioned thing, tossing abroad its waving, fleshless arms, a gleaming, glowering, dead and deadly thing, animate only with the evil life of the River Manitou.

The man gazed spellbound upon the lawless and uncontrolled river, not more wild and tameless than his own unfettered youth had been. And something there was in the savage license of its suggestiveness which made him shiver, as at the touch of some evil spirit of the night.

Dusk was coming on, and Saint-Maurice waited for

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him; so he started on towards the cabin. "César waiting," he thought, and laughed at the irony of César waiting for *him*.

Nevertheless he went on to the hut and threw open the door. The cabin was empty, but there lay his own luggage on the floor; Saint-Maurice had seen to it for him. Malcolm sat on the door-sill as darkness fell.

Perhaps for two hours he sat there; it had grown very dark now. But the moon would rise in two more hours, and he could go out to watch the river again. Still Saint-Maurice did not come. Malcolm rose and straggled aimlessly away.

A thick mist skulked above the river. Malcolm drew it into his lungs, and with it the river's malevolent spirit.

Along the upper edge of the island Malcolm stumbled over a sentinel lying murdered at his post. He knelt beside the man in the dark, placed his hand against his heart. It was as still as stone. Then he touched the forehead, the neck, and clotted blood clung sticky to his fingers. Work of the assassin and the scalping-knife. With a sickening sense of revolt the Christian fighting-man drew back from this loathsome thing. Many men had he seen writhe and scream aloud and stiffen out in death, until death itself had no fresh terrors for him. But mutilation such as this made his blood creep cold. And now he remembered a wild, shrill cry which came an hour before across the surging waste of waters. A silent pirogue had slipped away; a gloating savage had shrieked his triumph from the uttermost shore, from the safety of the shadows.

When others gathered about the body it was found to be that of "The Glum," as he was called, an Indian of the Illinois who had once guided the French on an expedition against his own people. For this act of

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treachery he dreaded his kinsmen's vengeance, and fled to the far south, taking service with Bienville.

Nika came and somewhat carelessly examined the corpse; the cunning fellow, stooping down more closely beside it, looked with critical eyes to where the scalp had been torn away. Then Nika rose with a gesture of disgust. Contemptuously kicking the carcass aside with his foot, he grunted:

"Illini kill; I hear him whoop yonder," pointing to the north, towards the home of that nation. It was the cry which Malcolm had heard.

The traitor and renegade had died by the hand of his own people. And now the noiseless dip, dip, dip of the avenger's paddle was speeding him back to lay his gory trophy at the feet of his chiefs.

The grawsome spectacle made a profound impression upon the sensitive mind of Malcolm. He had Nika to show him exactly how the scalp was taken, and admired the dexterous turn of the Indian's wrist, the grasp of the free hand as the hair was wrenched away. Something in Malcolm's morbid brain seemed fascinated by the horrid details. He even kept as a curiosity the Illinois knife purposely left sticking in the dead man's throat. The wide gash had closed again, purple and tight as the tense lips of the dead. The throat was soft and the knife had gone in so easily. Malcolm stooped beside the body and looked long upon it. What he pondered he did not know. He rose from his searching inquisition and turned to leave.

The Indians, without ceremonial or regret, prepared to rid themselves of the body as of some noxious thing. Within a few moments a pirogue was brought, the corpse tumbled into the shallow water among the willows, a cord hitched to it, and it was towed away, rolling and tugging at the thong. "The Glum" was flung like carrion to the river and swiftly disappeared.

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Walking unsteadily, as a man at variance with himself, Malcolm took his way again towards the cabin. A light shone now from the window. Malcolm passed in front of the door. Saint-Maurice sat inside, their simple meal spread out on the block in front of him, waiting. Malcolm paused at the door to look in; Saint-Maurice gazed out the window.

Malcolm glowered at him, then turned away and walked about again.

He came back. The man inside had not changed his position; his back, wrapped in a single thin garment, was towards the door. Several times Malcolm came and went before he entered.

"Hullo, you are late," his friend greeted him. "I've waited supper for you; sit down. What's the trouble, Malcolm, you look tired?"

"No, it's just so wretchedly hot, and this dampness gets into my bones."

"Take off your clothes and be comfortable," the other man suggested.

Saint-Maurice busied himself about their house-keeping, while Malcolm threw his heavier garments aside and took his place at table opposite César.

Saint-Maurice had rolled up the scant sleeves of his shirt and turned the collar in at the neck, showing the whiteness of breast and throat, in contrast with the sunburned regions just above. He pounced vigorously upon the eatables which Malcolm had not touched.

"Aren't you hungry?" he asked.

"No; I saw something awhile ago which took away my appetite. 'The Glum,' that Illinois Indian, was stabbed on post to-night; poor devil! stabbed in the throat, and scalped. I never before saw a man who had been scalped."

The listener paused with fork raised, while Malcolm could not keep his eyes off the other's throat. There

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was the very dimpled, hollow place where the knife had so silently killed.

"Here is the knife," Malcolm said, and he laid it out on the table, the blood scarcely dry. The hungry man pushed it aside.

"Come on, eat your supper; I'm literally starved. Afterwards you can tell me about it. That thing makes me sick to look at."

Malcolm handled the knife in silence, glancing up now and again at the other's throat.

"It was a very simple thing to do," he said, half meditatively. "I will show you how it was done." He rose and came round the table, sitting on the corner above the other man. Saint-Maurice paid little attention; as Malcolm was interested he let him have his way. Malcolm laid his left hand on his friend's shoulder and looked intently at the throat to fix the exact spot.

"It was right here," he said, and touched the place lightly with the point of the knife. He could almost feel the currents of blood beneath his blade.

"It seemed to close the wound," Malcolm said, almost to himself; "there was very little bleeding—very little."

He had such an unusual glitter in his eye, and his hand felt so scorching hot, that Saint-Maurice involuntarily jerked back from the point of the knife.

"Oh, I won't hurt you," laughed Malcolm.

"Put that ugly thing down, Malcolm; I'm afraid of it."

And Malcolm laughed again, low and rasping, as if some one had struck a piece of jangling metal with the blade of such a knife.

"Aren't you going to eat anything?" the hungry one inquired again.

"No," answered Malcolm. A terrible desire was tugging at his heart, and he broke no bread with Saint-Maurice.

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Two hours later César slept. Malcolm lay still in the adjoining room and listened to the breathing, listened to the tempter's voice. His head burned, his hatred burned. He raised himself upon his elbow. The moon had risen; her cruel half-light tempered the shadows in the room.

Directly Malcolm left his couch and crept in to where Saint-Maurice lay asleep on the pallet in the corner. Stretched out, the tired man slept profoundly.

Acting under strong, purposeless compulsion, Malcolm went in again and again to look at him. Saint-Maurice rested in much the same position as did the dead man by the willows. There was the same tender, trembling dimple in his throat. Malcolm imagined to himself a small purple gash, tight-closed, upon it.

Then the thought came and was quickly driven away—what if it had been this man killed at the post? How it would have simplified all their troubles.

Here in the forest all of gloss was stripped away, and the savage soul stood forth boldly naked as the savage body. Malcolm dreamed wild, passionate dreams—he stood face to face with his own wild, passionate desires.

He looked in again on Saint-Maurice. It would be easy, so fascinatingly easy, to go in, strike quickly, as did the gliding Indian in the dark. Horrible? Yes, but so very simple. The scalp could be removed—he knew how. What subtle fiend of temptation had prompted him to learn? It was easy. From his door he could toss the scalp into the rushing waters, and his secret would be safe. The grim and shrouded river hides many another secret of human error and human terror.

No, no, no; the man is helpless. Mark the strong, young arms; how truly rounded, how full of strength, how pink with pulsing life they are.

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But stop. Those are the very arms which may one day clasp Andrea—Malcolm's Andrea, but the wife of César—clasp her close to that self-same, gently heaving breast.

The knife lay there upon the table. It caught a malicious glitter from the moon. It tempted him fearfully; it was so keen, its work so sure, so deadly sure. He turned it over and over in his hand—the devilish, shining thing. And he looked at César's throat, pulsing with the hot, red blood of his friend.

Ah! but—wretched thought of horror—that is the throat upon which Andrea will lavish her kisses, her rich, warm kisses, warm as the blood which pulses at that throbbing spot—her sweet, generous kisses, her kisses of sacrifice, her kisses of happy love.

The knife sparkled and gleamed with a ghostly light from within itself; it taunted him to madness, it was so sure a cure for all. By the pallid light Malcolm sat at his table and planned—planned with all the careful cunning of an unbalanced mind. He would prepare himself for sleep as usual, rolling up his sleeves that no blood might touch them. Then what a simple thing it would be to creep in, kneel beside the man, and, carefully picking out the exact spot, strike, strike deep and sure. There might be a short struggle, but Malcolm was powerful.

Then he would have the scalp to remove—there was plenty of time for that. Two cuts, one this way, one that, and it slipped off smoothly enough; for the knife was sharp and his grip was strong. And the fresh blood could be washed away from the knife, his hands and arms; water was at the door. The river then would bear away the tuft of hair, and all would be done—well done.

In the morning, naturally, he would be the first to raise the alarm, and Saint-Maurice would seem another

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victim of the prowling midnight savage. And when all was ended Malcolm could return to Andrea. Why had he not thought of this before? From the smiling mirage that he conjured up he looked in again upon that accursedly tempting dimple in the throat of Saint-Maurice.

He made everything ready and sat again beside the table. He had plenty of time, and must think it all out in advance. He walked to the door and wondered if he could toss from there the tell-tale thing into the current. No, he would take no risk; he would bind it to the knife and cast both into the deeper channel.

Malcolm moved about swiftly as a flitting bat. His preparations were made. He came to the door beyond which Saint-Maurice slept.

Silence—tense, oppressive, appalling silence. Malcolm stood listening to the flutter of the sleeper's breath. And slow and steady, the knife behind him, he crept like a murderous *loup-garou* to where slept the man who stood between himself and every earthly hope. Saint-Maurice stirred, as a slumbering child who mutters in his dream. Malcolm paused, one foot half raised, until all was still again.

Then on and on and on he stole, until he knelt close beside that trembling, fascinating spot in the smiling sleeper's throat. And César stirred again.

In his own cabin, a hundred feet away from Malcolm, Gaston was writing a letter to be sent to Crozat. It was quieter now, and he could better collect his thoughts. The sputtering little dip which gave him light barely sent a doubtful glow of yellow to his paper. Now and again the man paused at his work.

Outside all was still, save for the hourly challenge of the sentinel, the cry of a night bird, the low, unceasing swish, swish of the willows bending to the waves.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

A shot, sharp and sudden and clear, barely caused him to listen more intently a moment, then the trail of ink flowed on again. Perhaps a frightened soldier had fired at a shadow. But he listened. His door stood wide open, for the night was warm. The moonlight shone upon the floor.

When the beams were at their brightest and a square of silver reached far into the room, a distorted shape hurled itself, like Caliban, across the centre of the light. A white figure, half crouching, staggered in and stood doubtfully erect with arms outstretched. The man was in his under-garments, splashed with mud and water, his bare legs scratched and bleeding. Haggard and wild and hunted, he clutched a great, broad-bladed knife. He looked behind him and listened into the dark.

Across his cheek ran a gaping, serried gash. His left sleeve, sodden in blood, dripped here and there a vicious spatter to the floor. He peered about the room and saw Gaston before the busy man could raise his eyes. Then he hesitated as if he wanted to run away again.

"In the name of God, Malcolm, what is the trouble? Where have you been?" Gaston cried, springing towards him.

Malcolm stared as if he scarcely heard or understood. In a confused and stupid sort of way he brushed his hand across his forehead, leaving a dull red smear. Then he answered: "Out yonder—out yonder somewhere," indicating vaguely the underbrush, the shallow waters, the vastness of the night. "Out yonder somewhere."

"You are hurt?" Gaston inquired, and then he saw the wild, dilated eyes, so fierce and restless that they frightened him.

"No," Malcolm mumbled; "no, I am not hurt."

THE PENITENCE OF CAIN

Gaston came quickly towards him and would have touched his head to see the wound, but the other drew back.

"What is the matter, man; you are hurt?" Gaston persevered, for he could see that Malcolm's entire left sleeve was wet and draggled, and the splotches dripped and dropped. He saw the ugly-looking, contused scar upon his cheek, one not made with a sharp weapon nor in lawful fight.

"No, no, I am not hurt," Malcolm insisted, stubbornly. "Yes, yes, I must have fallen. I remember now I did trip, out there, in the cane. Sit down, Gaston, sit here," he begged, placing a stool for his friend between himself and the door. "Look at me, Gaston, look at me close; do I look myself?" Malcolm held his face in the pale glare of the moon.

Frankly Gaston replied, for a strange light of suppressed excitement burned in Malcolm's eye:

"No, you do not; what is the trouble, Malcolm?" for he could see that something was wrong, very wrong.

Malcolm did not answer; he stood and stared apprehensively over his shoulder at the lurking fear outside. Then he asked Gaston again, earnestly, piteously:

"Gaston, you have known me long; have I always been a gentleman, a man of honor?"

"Yes, always," his wondering friend assured him.

"Would you think me a murderer, an assassin?"

"No, Malcolm, not you—never," and Gaston could see the mottling fever-flush on Malcolm's face.

"Well, I am; a murderer, an assassin, a coward."

"You? Impossible! Tell me—"

"Yes, a foul assassin," Malcolm went on, wildly. "Do you not see the brand of Cain upon my forehead, that even now I cannot look an honest gentleman in the face? There, there, see I" and he held out the

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

knife. "See the evil thing which tempted me! A midnight assassin who would strike his friend as he slept, César in the cabin yonder."

Malcolm sank down huddled into a formless heap on the floor; Gaston sprang up and started towards the door as if to go to Saint-Maurice. Malcolm clutched at his garments and implored him to stay.

"Stay, I want you here. I need you, he does not."

"What of him? Is he dead?"

"Wait—only wait. I will tell you." He pleaded for time.

"Quick, tell me," Gaston demanded. "Can I help him?"

"No, no, he does not need your help; he is quiet."

"How did it happen? Did you quarrel? Did you fight? What was it about?"

"No, he was asleep," and from the misery in the man's voice Gaston knew it all.

"You are wild, man—mad. What was the cause?"

Malcolm grasped the other's arm and whispered: "Mad? Yes, mad. Do you think so?" He lowered his tone and crept nearer Gaston, who involuntarily shrank away. "My mother was mad—yes, it is in me; I hope it was that. Did you know it?"

Gaston had heard the matter hinted at, but knew nothing definite. Commanding himself as best he could to learn the truth, Gaston bade Malcolm go on.

"It came so quickly," he said. "I saw the Indian killed to-night with a knife—this knife. He died so stilly. It made me think; it tempted me. 'What if César should die,' I thought; then Andrea might in time love me. Life would be so new, so precious a thing. But now"—and Malcolm dropped his muddy arms with a gesture of unutterable despair, trickling their streams of dabbled red—"now see how hopeless it all is. Gaston," he continued, "I was sorely tempt-

THE PENITENCE OF CAIN

ed; something in my head here burned and blistered and burst. It seemed so easy to me; it would appear he was killed as the Indian had been. So I carefully went about it; I crept into the room, this accursed knife in my hand—”

“And you murdered him in his sleep,” broke in the horrified listener, grappling him hand and throat. “Is he dead? Speak!”

Malcolm’s frenzied strength easily threw him loose, and he stood bolt upright. “No, thank God!—no. My guilt is only in the heart; there’s where the crimson stain of murder is. There’s no blood on my knife, is there?—look close, Gaston, is there?” he appealed. “It is all so dark to me. Be sure, Gaston; I am not certain. Oh, God! how near it was, how hideous! And I realized it all the time. I watched myself as though it were some other blood-craving beast clad in my shape which struck its sleeping friend. And then I would have helped him, but I could not—I could not.”

The wretched man shuddered and sobbed, then laughed aloud in sheer nervous exultation at the escape.

“And you did not kill him?” asked Gaston, slowly, not knowing what to believe from his random speech.

“No, thank God!—no. He still sleeps peacefully over yonder, and does not know.”

Malcolm now sat down upon the floor close beside his friend for protection. Gaston saw he was wild and delirious with fever, so he tried to pacify him. But Malcolm caught sight again of the knife yet in his hand. He bounded erect; his face grew hard and cruel; a blind fury blazed in his eyes. “The throat,” he muttered, and his fingers twitched. By a supreme effort he overcame himself, and hurled the flashing weapon far out into the all-devouring river.

“Keep me here till daylight comes,” he begged

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

Gaston, like a child afraid of the night. "I will be all right then."

"But the blood?" Gaston was still mystified, and pointed to the darkened sleeve.

"I think, perhaps, he struck me."

"Who struck you? Saint-Maurice? How?"

"No, no, not César—the sentinel; the sentinel shot at me, up there by the point. I fell and made a splash in the water, and he fired. Oh, I do not know; don't ask me any more."

Gaston bathed his wounds, dressed him in fresh linen, and forced him upon a pallet to rest.

For hours Malcolm slept, restless, disquiet, fearful, but still he slept. It had been a long night to Gaston.

Quite early in the morning Saint-Maurice came over, hurriedly and anxious.

"Have you seen anything of Malcolm? His clothes are in my cabin, but he is gone. I left him asleep last night."

"H'sh! he is here; he is delirious with fever, and wandered in during the night."

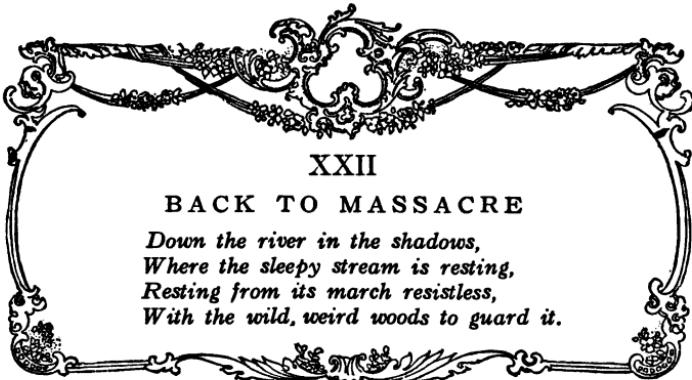
"I have been worried about him ever since he came," Saint-Maurice remarked; "he has acted very queerly."

At the sound of Saint-Maurice speaking, Malcolm woke. Gaston quietly pushed his visitor out of the door.

"Stay outside. Malcolm fancies he is afraid of you; delirious, you know; I forgot."

Saint-Maurice started off towards the governor's quarters, whistling a low air and thinking how strange that Malcolm should imagine a fear of him. A vagary of the fever; nothing more.

Some distance down the path he glanced back. There Gaston sat quietly in the door.



XXII

BACK TO MASSACRE

*Down the river in the shadows,
Where the sleepy stream is resting,
Resting from its march resistless,
With the wild, weird woods to guard it.*

ALL of that long day did Gaston keep company with Malcolm. L'Enfant came early in the morning, looked at him, and laughed his great, burly-hearted laugh, that was good for a sick man to hear.

"Eh! bien, my fren, you not so very bad. Come all good again to-morrow. Hot sun get in head. Make feel queer, that all." He brewed for Malcolm a cooling drink of the red magnolia berry; and he sat beside him, telling stories of the forest, weird tales of strange river folk. He went and came in idleness. Towards evening Malcolm's head cleared, and then once more, late in the evening, l'Enfant came again with good, cheering news.

"Mon Dieu! m'sieu, but these Natchez rascals are wise. Little Sun, he come to-day, bring heads three, m'sieu; fetch all together like pumpkins in a sack. It very good to see all roll out on ground—so;" he made a gesture as if tossing a ball.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"What!" Gaston and Malcolm exclaimed in one voice, rising; "has Little Sun come?"

"Oui, m'sieu; he come little while 'go. Bring all head but Oyelape; bring Oyelape brother's head instead; say Oyelape run away; catch him soon."

And l'Enfant sprawled himself in the door-way to laugh.

"Natchez wise, save much trouble," he philosophized. "Natchez chief good fighter, Bienville better; Natchez chief crafty, Bienville more. Indian cunning in treaty, Bienville beat him every time. I know all these Le Moynes in Canada before they come here. He young man, but wise; keep mouth shut, tight—so." And the old courier chuckled at the recollection of Bienville's many bloodless victories over the subtle Indian statesman.

The tale sounded well in the red fellow's mouth—this bringing of three heads in a sack, and tumbling them out at Bienville's feet, the gory, clotted things, upturning their defiant eyes, and l'Enfant gave great gusto to the telling.

"Well, what will we do now?" Gaston inquired, for he had grown restive over the prospect of a long absence from Massacre and Julie.

"Do? To-morrow Bienville shoot two chief what kill Frenchmen. Then build big fort on bluff. Make treaty. Smoke pipe. Do? M'sieu, there's pretty work yet, but"—and the huge limbs stretched out from the threshold as if itching at their uselessness—"no fighting, m'sieu, no fighting. Suppose must be lazy time some time, m'sieu. Not have good times all times," and he laughed.

Both the Frenchmen laughed with him, but not a laugh of unmingled regret—more amusement at l'Enfant's disgust over the peaceful solution of the whole affair. Truth to tell, there was even somewhat of relief in their merriment.

BACK TO MASSACRE

All through the day Saint-Maurice had kept aloof from the cabin where Malcolm lay, wondering why his friend should imagine a foolish fear of him. Now l'Enfant came and said that Malcolm's head had cleared, so he went to their cabin and sat upon the door-step talking with Gaston. Malcolm seemed a trifle moody towards him, but the unwelcome visitor took it in excellent temper.

Saint-Maurice was in a sore predicament. Bienville's entire expedition would soon return to Massacre, leaving only a garrison behind them. Saint-Maurice must choose his own course. It was manifestly impossible that the proud fellow should go to Massacre, for there was Julie. Neither did he desire to put himself beyond communication with Crozat, from whose efforts at home he waited so impatiently to hear.

Perhaps he might join some of the couriers who were bound for the north country, far up the mysterious river. Or he might remain at this new fort building yonder upon the bluffs. Bienville meant to call it Fort Rosalie, in honor of the Countess Pontchartrain, and Saint-Maurice, idly enough, thought it a pretty name.

He and Gaston, sitting on the door-step in the moon-light, talked a little in driblets.

"Well, César," Gaston had just said, with a huge sense of satisfaction, "we can get out of all this mess now; the danger seems to be past, and I'm devilish glad of it."

Saint-Maurice did not agree very promptly; instead, he replied: "No, Gaston, I rather think I may go farther north with Horn Moon; he's an excellent courier, and is bound to the Dakota land." Saint-Maurice spoke completely at random, but he thought it wise to begin laying a foundation for his refusal to return with them.

"What do you mean, César?" Gaston protested; "surely you cannot intend to—"

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"Yes, that is precisely what I do intend," the other man answered, definitely. "The roving fever is burning me again; I think I shall press farther inland to see for myself about all these strange monsters and cannibal tribes up country. The rôle of knight-errant, wandering in the woods, strikes my fancy just now. There may be distressed damsels and fiery dragons and things up there—the adventure appeals to me." Saint-Maurice laughed lightly at the conceit of it, then added, more seriously: "At any rate, I'm not going back to Massacre Island; it's too deadly dull. I'd die of sheer idleness."

Gaston tried in vain to reason him out of his foolish determination, then quite lost his temper at the other's stubbornness. They had entirely ceased their discussion, and were sitting like men who had quarrelled.

Suddenly quick steps came running down the path towards them, and de Richebourg's excited voice shouted out:

"Crenan, Crenan—where is Crenan?"

"Here," Saint-Maurice answered, and both men ran out to meet him.

De Richebourg, usually so self-controlled, was pale and trembling as he called out his news of disaster:

"Crenan, the Chickasaws have taken Massacre Island—"

"My God! Julie!" Saint-Maurice staggered; the earth gave way beneath him. He steadied himself as a man who stands upon a plunging deck, grasping Gaston by the shoulder. "My God! man, how did you hear this?"

"A runner of the Tunicas brings the news to Bienville."

"Come," and Saint-Maurice started on a dead run, half dragging Gaston towards the governor's hut.

"What do you mean to do?" Gaston questioned.

BACK TO MASSACRE

"Do? Why, go to her at once."

"A desperate chance, César."

Saint-Maurice gave him such a glance of scorn as brought the red blood to his face.

"You mistake me, César. I do not intend to hang back. I go with you."

"Good," and they hurried to the governor's.

"Go for l'Enfant—bring him to Bienville."

Bienville was very grave, and did not seek to make light of the tidings. He had heard no further details, and could not say whether it was true.

"My runners have gone to fetch me more news; you can wait—"

"Not an hour. We can get our men ready—"

"Half hour plenty time," suggested l'Enfant, who had come in and stood at the door behind them. The red fellow's face blazed at the prospect of a fight.

"Big Pierre busy calling men now."

"What about Malcolm?" Gaston asked, suddenly.

"Take him in boat, too; he all right," l'Enfant assured him.

Bienville contributed ten of his best couriers and his two swiftest pirogues.

There was quick work and no talking when the expedition massed at the shore—nineteen men and four canoes. Their two Indians could not be used.

The moon was up, casting her pallor down the centre of the stream; to the sides all was gloom and mystery.

"You get in first boat," l'Enfant commanded Saint-Maurice.

He placed Malcolm and Gaston also in separate boats, dividing the dead burden. And then he chose his men for the other boats with utmost care, according to their weight and skill, so all the boats were equally trimmed and balanced. "One heavy boat make slow pace for all," he said.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

L'Enfant looked out upon the rushing river. His face beamed with a voyageur's delight.

"Current above two leagues to the hour, m'sieu," l'Enfant remarked delightedly; "make quick journey. Fly south like duck in winter."

All was ready. With something of a dramatic gesture, l'Enfant stood erect in the first canoe and shouted back:

"All ready?"

"Ready," from each boat.

L'Enfant's great voice rose in a wild river-song from the north country, while the men poised their impatient paddles:

"Voyageur, voyageur,
A dip deep and a strong sweep,
Voyageur, voyageur,
For hell's awake on the roaring lake
And the devil's at the burning.
Allons! mes braves, allons! allons!"

One following the other along the same track, the slim canoes sprang forward, as unleashed dogs of the chase, then settled down to regular bounds like the swinging lope of a long horse.

Already the island of the Tunicas was forgotten, a blurred and indistinct memory, melting into the mist behind.

Those who watched upon the shore heard the faint and fainter singing:

"Dip deep, a long sweep. *Allons! allons! allons!*"

They were gone.

A stern chase is a long chase, and it was a long, long chase of four gray geese strung out upon the water. South and south, and on and on, the winged night-birds flew. And the steaming river whirled and gurgled

BACK TO MASSACRE

in their wake, writhing like a shining serpent tormented in its bed. The rushing torrent bore many other burdens, but they overtook and passed them all.

“Silence!” shouted l’Enfant, from the first boat; the men hushed their song and saved their wind to give their work.

Now there was nothing to listen for but the low whir of hissing waters, the lap, lap, lap of the waves dashing against the bow. Only once, passing close inshore, came a low cry like the wailing of a babe. Saint-Maurice turned his head towards it.

“*Le loup-garou,*” shuddered pious l’Enfant, crossing himself and mumbling his *paters* as he drove his dripping blade deeper into the waters.

He cast one fearsome glance at the thicket whence the cry had come, and mumbled his prayers again.

And then he ran headlong into one of those matted masses of drift which clogged the river, called “*embarras*” by the voyageurs. By heavy tugging and straining they lifted the logs and went on, l’Enfant cursing at his own carelessness.

In hurriedly shoving a dead tree from their path, Saint-Maurice wrenched his wrist severely and cursed his fortune; it was a serious matter, for it practically disabled a fighting man.

In and out, dexterously avoiding the floating logs and dangerous *embarras*, l’Enfant guided the four canoes, strung out at even distances, like long, black beads upon a shimmering silver thread, slipping, sliding, flying along.

Six times they paused for a half-hour’s rest, for a stamping and stretching on the shore. The dark hours passed like a grim nightmare of mists and phantoms; the day crackled by their ears in blaze and glare and burning brilliance. The men’s backs glistened; their

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

knotted muscles worked as a perfectly oiled machine, steady and tireless.

Then night settled down again.

Midnight came, and it astounded the Frenchmen to find themselves again at the portage to the shallow lake they had crossed on their upward journey.

“Men strong; tough like puma,” remarked l’Enfant, as they tossed their light boats from the water and lifted them like shells across the two tangled leagues to the lake.

Not a word; each man knew his proper place—each man drove his own paddle deep, and trusted to the others. On they flew again; flew like the very winds, but all too slow for Saint-Maurice’s tense impatience.

Morning came, and the blue gulf spread out before them. The sun glittered directly in their eyes. Massacre lay straight on ahead.

The sun came to its zenith—yonder lay the bay of St. Louis to their left. It is gone. No sound from that unwearied human machinery. The sun dropped a little behind them, and to the south; to landward rose the stockades of Fort Biloxi. They heeded no signal from the fort—swept by.

Already Saint-Maurice was beginning to look for the plumpy pines of Massacre. The light had faded from the western sky, and shadow by shadow the denser darkness hedged them in. The intently staring man in the bow of the first pirogue strained his eyes the harder to make out what was hidden far ahead. Nothing yet—nothing but the same dull sky-line to the east, the same continuous jagged streak of gray racing by on their left; on the right the weird, ghost-like, misshapen creatures, low islands, crouching flat against the sea.

It must have been somewhere near the middle of the night when l’Enfant pointed straight ahead to a

BACK TO MASSACRE

low cloud in their front. "Massacre," was all he said. Saint-Maurice shuddered at the sinister name, and clutched his weapons tighter.

Every eye was fixed anxiously upon the murky spot, looking for the dull red glare—that inevitable aftermath of savage war. Not a sign. And drawing closer, like hard-breathing steeds, they sniffed the air, and turned their ears, for scent or cry. The Island of Forgotten Death guarded its secret well—it told them nothing.

Out of earshot, l'Enfant stopped his canoe. One by one, as racers reach the goal, the others came. Hurriedly and low the men talked.

"No light, no big fire—seem queer. Best land here," said l'Enfant.

And on the sandy western point they ran their canoes ashore.

L'Enfant led his cautious file of men along the sand, Saint-Maurice, Malcolm, and Gaston, despite their remonstrances, being placed well in the rear. Not a sound disturbed the deathlike slumbers of the summer island. There is something appalling in a tense, expectant stillness; it fired the very marrow of these Frenchmen's bones. They were used to battles and sudden frays, but not to this. Their muffled tread through the loose sand was all the keenest ear could hear. All around they peered and listened for some evidence of conflict. A little way ahead stood the first lone cabin on the outskirts of the garrison. L'Enfant went crawling up to this alone. The others waited. In a moment he came back, erect and noisily.

"Ugh," was all he said; "come." He took Saint-Maurice to the lead and strode boldly to the house again.

"Look;" he pointed to the open door. At the threshold outside a man lay stretched. Saint-Maurice looked closer

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"Oh, he only sleep," said l'Enfant; "see inside." A candle flickered in its socket. There lay a woman, quietly, in her sleeping-bunk; now and again she reached out her hand to give the cradle a push.

Saint-Maurice glanced back at the others who had followed.

"Heap big lie," he heard Big Pierre mutter. The disgusted Canadian walked over to the foot of a pine, scraped together a bunch of straw, and composed himself to sleep. In a moment l'Enfant and the three gentlemen were standing alone—the others had dropped in their very tracks, asleep.

The three men looked their inquiries of l'Enfant; he laughed and swore.

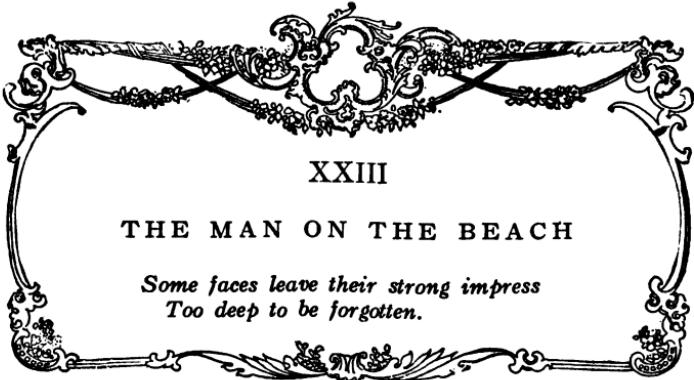
"Chickasaw not leave anything if he come; no woman—no baby—no house—nothing. Tunica runner tell big lie. Good-night, m'sieu," l'Enfant added, briefly, and he, too, lay down.

The sudden revulsion from their terrible anxiety of the last two days was too great to permit the less stoical Frenchmen to sleep at once. They felt ashamed to go to post at that time of the night and explain their unexpected appearance. So they rolled up their coats and found the soft, warm sand not so bad a bed as some they had slept upon.

Saint-Maurice lay long awake, harassed by his bitter reflections. Sorely against his will he found himself again face to face, as it were, with Julie. From no point of view could he find a glimmer of consolation in the thought that she was near him. But the very hopelessness of his position nerved him to meet it like a man.

He would say nothing to her; in his situation there was nothing he could say. He could only wait in silence for whatever Uncle Antoine might do.

Then he slept at last.



XXIII

THE MAN ON THE BEACH

*Some faces leave their strong impress
Too deep to be forgotten.*

SINCE the departure of Malcolm and Gaston, Julie had eagerly sifted the undercurrents of garrison gossip, and learned the deadly danger to Bienville's expedition. She had also confirmed, by many cautious inquiries, the fact that this Captain Crenan was beyond all question César de Saint-Maurice. The woman no longer concealed from herself the intense anxiety she felt, though she inwardly vowed it was on account of Gaston and of Malcolm.

Inconsistently enough, in her constant brooding the face she saw was that of another man—a darker man than either. She shook off the thought and tried to fix her mind upon her friends, her real friends—the "gentlemen," she bitterly phrased it—who were in peril. As well might Julie seek to still the restless surf which tormented Massacre; for when each wave of self-deception swept itself away, she saw all too clearly the unchanging woman that they left uncov-

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

ered. It became more and more a hateful thing for the proud girl to find her childish love still dominant and unconquered. Hateful, too, for Andrea loved this man, and Julie felt herself a serpent warmed in the trustful bosom of her friend, who would steal away her lover.

And yet, every hour of the day did Julie watch the vacant western waters, and listen all the nights.

Cadillac's erratic daughter was no companion for her, so she turned to Sister Katherine. There was something in the patient sadness of the Sister's smile which drew Julie close to another woman who seemed to understand. The Sister's quiet face, as she went about her oftentimes irritating tasks, impressed Julie with a deep belief that this other woman had not always been so calm and self-contained—that she, too, had been tempted, perhaps had tottered to the brink, and had conquered her temptation. So Julie spent her days with Sister Katherine, helping about her work. It was a new thing for Julie to lean for strength upon any other human creature—yet she was not ashamed. Together she and Sister Katherine had taken Nicolette to themselves, dressed her in a sober garb, and laughingly called her their 'lady-in-waiting'. And the contrite little actress won a wealth of real tenderness from both.

It was Sister Katherine's custom to rise at dawn, for the supervision of her girls at their tasks.

On the morning of Saint-Maurice's return with l'Enfant's party, Julie, uneasy and sleepless, awoke with the Sister. The air was fresh and cool; the two women walked down the ridge in the centre of the island, talking a little, thinking much.

Just beyond the last cabin to the west, Julie almost trampled upon a man, lying there in a burrow in the sand. His face was burned by the sun and water,

THE MAN ON THE BEACH

the dew glistened on his long, black hair. She almost screamed as she recognized Saint-Maurice; Julie stumbled so close upon the man before she saw him, and he lay so still.

She recognized him, and hurriedly, with a silent little cry, she stooped beside him, but the Sister caught her arm. "He is only asleep, my daughter; come, let us go back; let them sleep—there are his companions." She pointed out several other men lying in the hollows.

Surly Jean, who lived in the cabin, walked out with his baby, and deferentially touched his cap. Jean was better betimes than men gave him credit for.

"L'Enfant, and the gentlemen who went away last week," he said. "Maybe come ashore last night—sleep there—long journey—very tired."

Some of the couriers were already stirring. Sister Katherine and Julie hurried back; the younger woman glanced again on Saint-Maurice's upturned face, tanned with sun and wind. The placid Sister meditated upon her labors; Julie struggled again with the storm.

Before the men were well awake they had an urgent summons for Captain Crenan and Counts Freret and Lautrec to attend the governor. With very slight delay to change their draggled clothing, they waited upon the pompous official.

Cadillac hardly succeeded in mastering his impatience long enough to impress them with those stilted courtesies which generally so inflated the lungs of his importance. After the briefest of polite interchange, he asked:

"Well, gentlemen, what of my expedition? I have had no news; am quite in the dark. Will you kindly tell me why no courier has been sent me?"

His tone was so supercilious it aroused immediate antagonism in the two men, neither of whom quite

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

relished being spoken to in such fashion. Gaston very coolly replied:

"Your Excellency must question Monsieur de Bienville; he was in command, not I."

"True, true," Cadillac petulantly assented; "what goes wrong can generally be laid to Monsieur de Bienville."

Malcolm was in an evil mood. He opened his lips to retort, but the more even-tempered Gaston quieted him with a look. Then they both saw the humorous side of the situation, and were rather amused than annoyed by Cadillac's childish choler.

"Monsieur de Bienville," the governor proceeded, "gives me more trouble than all the Indians, these wretched Canadians and hoity-toity women all in one heap. But never mind, never mind. What has been done?"

Then Saint-Maurice, with a malicious eloquence, dilated upon Bienville's magnificent strategy; he painted in glorious colors the diplomacy and the courage of a general who had maintained the dignity of French justice, and who had forced the powerful Natchez to build him a fort commanding their own territory without losing a man.

Cadillac fairly writhed under the glowing narrative; his face was a study to behold—and these young fellows did not fail to behold it and to enjoy it. Red flushes of anger streaked and splotched across his cheeks. He looked like a painted actress in garish light of day. They could see him gulp back something in his throat, and brace his feet against the floor.

"Do you mean to say, gentlemen," he sputtered out, "that this Bienville invited the chiefs to a friendly conference, then threw them in prison?"

"He did, your Excellency, until they gave up the guilty ones."

THE MAN ON THE BEACH

"Infamous—treacherous," foamed Cadillac.

"Superb—glorious," smilingly corrected Saint-Maurice.

"There will be war—bloody war. This Bienville will be responsible; he knows nothing of the Indians. They will thirst for revenge."

"On the contrary, your Excellency, they seemed well pleased, and declare that Monsieur de Bienville has acted with great leniency in only putting to death those actually guilty. They are working faithfully to build the fort."

"That signifies nothing, they are so perfidious."

"Then where can be the harm of Bienville's stroke of *finesse*?" Gaston inquired.

"He should have been above that, above disgracing the honor of France. Then, it tarnishes *my* name in history."

"Be contented, your Excellency," Saint-Maurice remarked, very quietly; "this will always be known as 'Bienville's Expedition,' and *your* name will never be connected with it."

Cadillac looked up, uncertain how to take this consoling remark.

"He should have marched into their village—" began the governor.

"With twenty-three effective men, to attack twelve hundred well-armed warriors."

"De Soto did it."

"And De Soto is still up there, lying in the river," suggested Saint-Maurice.

"Where did he place his fort?"

"On the Natchez bluffs."

"The idiot, right in the midst of the nation. He should have put it across the river."

"Would *you* have advised putting it across the river?" César inquired.

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"Assuredly, assuredly; it would have been military wisdom, nearer our allies, with the river between himself and the Natchez."

"And put him two fathoms deep in water when the river rises," suggested Malcolm, in quiet malice.

"Build it on the western bluffs, then." Cadillac turned from one of his polite tormentors to the other.

"There is no bluff for a hundred leagues on that side." It was Gaston's turn to dip his oar.

Cadillac was quite ignorant that they merely baited him on, they were so smilingly polite, and, of course, being strangers, knew nothing whatever, as he considered it, of colonial affairs.

When they had aggravated him until they were weary, Cadillac bowed them out, moving stiffly as a jointed wooden doll, and they went down upon the beach to laugh.

"Bienville will have a gay reception when he gets home. I feel sorry for him," Malcolm said.

"I do not; I feel sorry for Cadillac"—César took the other view—"that is, if anybody is present to witness their interview. That iceberg fellow up yonder will make Cadillac show temper like a teething child; then he will simply annihilate him. I tell you, Malcolm, it isn't the robe of office, but the man beneath it, that counts."

"Here's a good place—sit down," and they sat upon the knotted roots of an oak, washed bare by the waves. The three men were in high good-humor, laughing gayly as school-boys at the way they had taunted Cadillac.

Their backs were towards the garrison, and a considerable mound screened them from view. They had chosen a place to sit which happened to be Nicolette's particular sanctuary, where she always came for rest; and Nicolette was coming towards it at this moment.

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The girl came swinging herself along towards where the men were sitting, but she could not see them. Her soberer gown, given by Sister Katherine, became her well, even if her eyes were dark with many nights of weeping, and with days of searching the vacant western waters. Her cheeks, too, had lost the freshness of her gay Parisian play-house. Yet Nicolette was pretty, and Nicolette was very young. She had never been an evil woman—in the light of her own pliant conscience. Only full of life, only bright, vivacious, craving adulation—and French.

Now that Malcolm had returned, her sun of happiness shone bright again. Light-hearted as a bird released, she came tripping down the sands to her familiar seat beside the sea, warbling a dainty little air.

That very morning she had blest the Virgin on her knees that Malcolm came home safe, and went singing about her work. It took only the crumbs of joy to bring the old, sweet songs, so long repressed, bubbling in melody to her lips. For Nicolette was honest, and did not even pretend to herself that she was sorry for the only precious memory which her years of garish triumphs had left her.

The three men were laughing yet at Cadillac, when they were startled by a crumbling of the sand behind them. They sprang erect, and there stood a woman on the crest, slipping slowly down the slope, catching at anything to stop herself.

Gaston very gallantly caught an arm, and steadied her to her feet. She did not heed him. For a moment Nicolette saw but the one man—to her there was but one—Malcolm. The presence of strangers forbade anything but the merest nod between them. Yet she could not quite keep back a smile of gladness; in spite of herself it came. She thanked Gaston very prettily

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for his timely aid, with a gay little laugh at her awkward situation. Then something impelled her to glance quite carelessly at the other man—Saint-Maurice. She did not draw her eyes away again—she simply stared and stared.

Her eyes froze in horror to Saint-Maurice's face; she drew back as from a ghost of guilt, with a look of frightened disbelief and deadly fear. The same man she had deceived to his ruin in the forest of Ardennes—him who was dead—there he stood in life before her.

Nicolette stopped still, very still, as a bird poises itself for flight, every limb of pulseless stone, her features still, her heart still, her breathing still, gazing at Saint-Maurice.

It could only have been the fleetest instant, but a lifetime to Nicolette. In one mad rush, breath, volition, fear, all came to her again together; she backed away, step by step, then whirled and made no excuse to fly.

Gaston and Saint-Maurice watched her in wonderment, wonderment no less than Malcolm's.

"What's the matter with the woman?" Saint-Maurice ejaculated. "Egad! how she runs! She did not look so timid when she first tumbled in on us. Who is she?"

"One of the girls who came over on the ship with us; I believe I remember seeing her on board." It was Gaston who replied.

Malcolm said nothing.

"You certainly scared the life out of her, César," Gaston jokingly continued. "I never knew a woman to be afraid of me."

Malcolm laughed it off, and proposed that they return to quarters. "Come with me to our cabin."

"No, I am tired," Saint-Maurice replied, "and my wrist pains me greatly; see how much swollen it is. I

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will sit here awhile and rest," he raised a finger and pointed at the sea. "Do you notice how blue the sea is over there, how much bluer out yonder than it is closer in? Looks as if you could almost put your finger on that clear-cut line dividing the colors."

But Malcolm was thinking neither of the seas nor yet of the heavens; his thoughts were of the earth.

"What in folly's name could have ailed Nicolette?" he wondered, as he started towards the cabin where he was to lodge. Gaston made off by another path to his own quarters.

"I will come after a little," called Saint-Maurice to Malcolm over the ridge.

Malcolm walked slowly towards his cabin along the sandy way, dignified by the name of street. Some distance off, among the cabins, Nicolette passed him; she passed and did not even lift her head. Without stopping, the girl said, hurriedly and low:

"I must see you at once; soon as it is quite dark. The fallen pine yonder." Malcolm nodded and the tryst was made. And Malcolm strode on, thinking, to his door.





XXIV

THE TEMPTATION

*Hangs Fate by such a slender stran,
'Twixt shame and glory scarce a span.*

THE night had come, the stars had come, and cooler breezes through the pines had softly hymned the torrid day's recessional. Evening brought the hour for Malcolm's appointment with Nicolette.

The sand, warm yet as the ashes of a just extinguished fire, crunched and gave way beneath his feet as he climbed the gentle slope towards the fallen pine. Malcolm mounted the slight ridge which ran like a backbone through the centre of the island and looked about him. No one was in sight, not even a stir beside the pine, for Nicolette lay still as the formless shadows of the brush. She rose immediately.

“Oh, Fifi, I am *so* glad you are come.”

“What troubled you so?” he asked, as he sat down upon the uprooted tree, she seating herself against a sandy knoll near his feet. She clasped her hands about her knees, and said nothing for a while. He went on, following his idea of the afternoon.

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"You behaved very strangely upon the beach. Were you not pleased that we got back safely?"

For answer, she groped her hand to his, and touched it, ever so softly, in the dark.

"Fifi," was all she uttered audibly, yet so reproachfully, so full of regret that he should doubt, the single word conveyed a wealth of tender chiding.

"What was the trouble with you this afternoon? You looked positively scared."

"I *was*," she replied, simply; and her pause was so suggestive of something more to come that Malcolm did not disturb her.

"Who was that gentleman with you, Fifi—the tall one, with the scar?"

"That was Captain Crenan—Captain Ernest Crenan."

"Do you know him *well*?"

"No—yes—that is, I was on the expedition with him, and men grow very close together under such circumstances."

"When did he come here?"

"He came out some weeks before we did."

"You knew him at home?"

"Yes—no—that is— Why are you questioning me so closely?"

"Do you know who he is, Fifi?" she asked, ignoring Malcolm's question; and the man, loyally lying, answered "No."

Her quick wit told her there was something behind all this, but she only asserted positively, "Well, *I* know."

Malcolm sprang up, with an exclamation of unbelieving surprise.

"Fifi, why are you so interested?" Nicolette asked. "But I will tell you first. Do you remember what I told you, that night on the ship, about the young soldier who let me pass the lines?"

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"Yes, what of it?"

"They told me he was dead. They lied to me. *This is the man.*"

Malcolm now became earnestly interested, the identification of Nicolette throwing such a flood of light upon an incident which before this had only excited a passing curiosity. But it was like a flash of lightning, which only intensified the after darkness when he came to think more carefully of it. For who could have any motive to bring Saint-Maurice into disgrace? After all, it might only be a girl's wild tale. He sat down again, his brain busy with the possibilities.

"Nonsense, Nicolette, you must be mistaken."

"No, indeed; no, I am not. I would know him among a million, and was frightened to death lest he might know me, too. But I look so different now, in this long skirt and stiff collar, like Sister Katherine; no wonder he did not recognize me," and the girl glanced down doubtfully at the unwonted demureness of her garments.

"Nicolette, there must be some mistake here. Why should any one have done such a thing?"

"I do not know; believe me, Fifi, I do not. I only know it was done. But the queerest thing about it all is, I saw the old man who told me what to do, and who paid me—I saw him just before we left Paris. He came, with a young girl, to see Sister Katherine."

"He did?" questioned Malcolm. "What sort of a man was he? How did he look?"

"He was old and thin, but strong; had a little, gray beard, gray hair, and bushy eyebrows, and such keen, sharp eyes they looked directly through me. There was a beautiful young girl with him, hanging to his arm; a little, blond girl, with such a sweet, patient expression it made me love her. He called her Andrea—"

Malcolm listened with widening eyes, and at this point broke in unconsciously, half aloud, "Crozat!"

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"Yes, Crozat—Crozat—Crozat—that was the name," the girl repeated, catching it eagerly. "I have been trying so hard to remember it. When he came to see the Sister I was deadly afraid he might see me. He frightens me. So I hid until he and the girl were gone. Do you know him?"

Malcolm did not answer. "Go on, Nicolette, tell me all about it; how did you meet this man whom you call 'Crozat'?"

"I told you all that once before. No? You do not remember?" the girl went on and retold the entire story.

Malcolm appeared to pay little attention to what the girl was saying. He was scraping his heel back and forth in the sand. But not a single word he missed, or failed to weigh. What motive on earth could Crozat have for getting César into trouble? César, the son of his friend, the man whom his idolized daughter loved.

On the other hand, it was not conceivable that Nicolette could have made up such a tale. The purpose of Crozat lay either too deep or too shallow for Malcolm's penetration.

The first impulses of Malcolm were always manly and honest. At first he had no other thought than of going straight to Saint-Maurice. Intent on this, he drew every bit of information from the girl, then resumed his reflections.

"There is just one thing to do, Nicolette; that is, to tell César," Malcolm finally observed.

"César?" She repeated the name.

"Captain Crenan, I mean—to tell Captain Crenan what you have told me, and see what can be done to make amends."

"I would not dare; he might kill me; think how angry, how outraged he would be."

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"But I *will* tell him, Nicolette."

The girl began to cry, and took refuge in a woman's last trench. "Then I will deny it," she sobbed.

Malcolm stared at her blankly. The story was improbable enough, at best. It would be hard, indeed, to make Saint-Maurice believe that "Uncle Antoine" had turned against him, and if Nicolette did not give her hearty assistance the truth could never be learned. She was frightened now, and all argument was vain. Nicolette went to tears again, when she could give no better reason.

"Good-night, Fifi," and the girl slipped away to her own room, leaving Malcolm to puzzle out the strange problem which had so suddenly come to him. Malcolm could always think better if he had somebody to help him; Saint-Maurice generally adjusted Malcolm's thinking-cap, but he could not be consulted now.

"I'll go to Mademoiselle de Severac," he determined. Then he realized that Julie, of all women, would be the last to credit an evil tale of Crozat. So, when he went to Julie and faced her quiet countenance, he simply let the conversation drift, never mentioning Nicolette. Julie encouraged him to talk of their experiences up the river. And Malcolm, who could think of nothing better, interested Julie very much by a brisk narrative of their adventures on the expedition, culminating with the fearfully anxious journey back to Massacre. While they talked, both of them saw Saint-Maurice himself slowly approaching; Julie grew nervous, and appeared more absorbed in what Malcolm said. Saint-Maurice glanced up, saw Malcolm sitting with Julie, hesitated a moment, then came straight on. He came directly to them, greeted them courteously, then apologized to Julie.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle, but I must speak with Count Lautrec on a matter of some moment."

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He and Malcolm walked briskly off together, Saint-Maurice silent and contemplative, Malcolm uneasy and curious, wondering what the other man had discovered. He had not long to wait.

"You remember when we met the girl down on the beach—the one who was so frightened?"

Malcolm thought surely he had recognized Niclette, and the revelation had come. Saint-Maurice grew white with suppressed anger until Malcolm almost feared him.

"After you left me, Mandeville, Latour, d'Ornay, and some others, all enemies to Bienville, overtook me as I was walking. Naturally, we fell into conversation—" Saint-Maurice rose and paced up and down the beach, gathering his wrath. Malcolm had never seen him so angry and determined. Not knowing what to expect, he also arose from where he was sitting and faced the other. Saint-Maurice turned sharply upon him.

"Well, to cut it short, I have become involved in a duel, and want you to act for me immediately. The matter is urgent and must be attended to at once."

Malcolm was surprised; he had prepared himself for quite another sort of outburst. But such affairs had not been entirely unknown in both their lives.

"What is the quarrel? Who is the man?" he asked.

"That young hot-head, d'Ornay; Mandeville is his second."

"The quarrel?" Malcolm inquired, briefly.

Saint-Maurice replied: "You remember how the governor abused Bienville to us? Well, these gentlemen met me, and brought up the subject—quite accidentally, as it seemed. I told them what had been done at the Tunicas, as I would to soldiers and gentlemen who were interested. I suspect now they simply desired to pick a quarrel with somebody on that account, in order

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to curry favor with Cadillac. The governor had probably already told them our news. Anyway, taking their cue from the Gascon, they denounced Bienville, and this young fool d'Ornay branded Bienville as a treacherous coward, who feared an open fight. It was more than I could swallow. I chastised him. He challenged me, and named Mandeville."

"What do you want to do?"

"Fight, immediately, the impudent fool. I suspected nothing, and care nothing for their puny jealousies over here."

"When?"

"The sooner the better. I told them you would seek Mandeville at once."

In matters of this kind Malcolm was thoroughly at home, and this struck him as quite an irreproachable *casus belli*. He asked no further information, but set off immediately with all haste to arrange details with Mandeville, of whom he had heard as a brave, high-minded officer.

Mandeville received him most courteously, giving of his best wines and most comfortable seat. A few polite remarks, then Malcolm began:

"You are aware of my errand?"

Mandeville bowed.

"Let me first inquire—I know nothing of the quarrel—you saw it?"

"I did."

"Let me inquire, then, does the honor of the gentleman permit any peaceable solution?"

"I believe, monsieur, none is possible," Mandeville replied, decidedly.

"It is our duty, if possible—"

"Impossible."

"That simplifies matters. You think they *must* fight?"

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"Assuredly," he replied, with such positive manner as to forbid further parley.

"You know the locality better than I. Where is a suitable place?"

"The best is on the mainland, just across the bay; it is level, clear of brush, and firm. It has been the scene of many such affairs."

"The time?" Malcolm inquired. "My own experience is, the more prompt the better."

"True, always true," Mandeville assented. "Unfortunately, my principal is officer of the day to-morrow, and I must ask delay until he can attend to this without neglecting his duty. Will you allow me a suggestion?"

"Certainly."

"D'Ornay comes off watch at two; the sea-breeze rises at four. By five it will be cool, and we can paddle across to the point yonder, as if for recreation; there we will be safe from interruption until the little affair is happily arranged. How would that suit your principal?"

"It seems very convenient," agreed Malcolm. "I am new at this in the colonies, and must defer largely to your good judgment." Mandeville's reputation as a soldier and a gentleman was such that Malcolm felt he could rely upon his absolute fairness. Then, too, he could see no room for any advantage in the proposition.

"Have you anything further to suggest?" Mandeville inquired, politely.

"Nothing. At five we leave the island and proceed —where?"

"Our party will go somewhat in advance; you can follow. We will agree as to the exact spot when we are on the ground—position, all."

"A surgeon?" Malcolm asked.

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"Vivrot will come. We will say nothing to him until the last minute. The fewer who know of it the better."

"Good."

"What weapons do you name?" asked Mandeville, quite as a matter of form.

"The customary," Malcolm replied; gentlemen used no others, and both the seconds knew perfectly well their correct measurement and weight. A few moments longer they chatted, then Malcolm rose to leave. Mandeville, frankly cordial, extended his hand.

"I regret, monsieur, to meet you under such circumstances, and venture to hope in the future we may be friends." The man made a very pleasant impression upon Malcolm, who returned, in all sincerity, his kindly words of parting.

Then Malcolm went to Saint-Maurice through the moonlight, across the white stretches of sand. His principal acquiesced in all arrangements, though he chafed at the delay, for he wanted the matter promptly settled.

"But"—and the idea just occurred to Malcolm—"your wrist; César, your wrist? You cannot handle a rapier."

"It is a trifle stiff," Saint-Maurice reluctantly admitted, "and weaker than I would have it; but I shall fight, nevertheless."

"I quite forgot that, or I would have deferred the meeting."

"No, not for an hour; that is precisely why I did not remind you. It is delayed too long now." Saint-Maurice seemed in an ugly temper—a bad sign. He began his undressing, and set about going to bed.

Malcolm helped him unroll the bandages which swathed his wrist. It was much swollen and very stiff. They bathed it with a liniment provided by the

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surgeon. "César," Malcolm said, very positively, "you cannot fight with such a wrist as that. I will—"

"Do nothing whatever," Saint-Maurice rejoined, with equal decision. "I mean to fight, and there's an end of it."

"And most likely will be the end of you," Malcolm supplemented.

"Which is my own affair." Saint-Maurice was very angry and not disposed to brook even a friendly suggestion.

Malcolm sat and watched him. César was now stripped to the waist, and Malcolm fastened his eyes upon that throbbing spot in his throat. It waked again that fierce temptation which had so nearly mastered him on the island of the Tunicas. For a moment he looked on the other man with hate, then, with a curt "Good-night," and the injunction to "sleep well," Malcolm left Saint-Maurice to his slumbers.

Malcolm walked out in the night, back and forth across the sandy island. Then a great temptation came upon him. He had warned Saint-Maurice not to fight, that it might be the end of him; suppose it should prove to be his end? A possibility which opened up the world again to Malcolm. There could be no doubt of d'Ornay's skill with the sword; at best Saint-Maurice would have a hard battle. With that wrist to hamper him, Saint-Maurice could hope for nothing less than a dangerous wound, perhaps death, for d'Ornay would doubtless strain every nerve to kill the man who had slapped his face.

Malcolm's head whirled; plainly it was his duty to stop this duel, as his principal was in no condition to fight, but Malcolm stifled the clamor of his honor. He had already warned Saint-Maurice; that should be sufficient. It was not for Malcolm to forever block the

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path of his own happiness. César was a grown man; he would let him have his way.

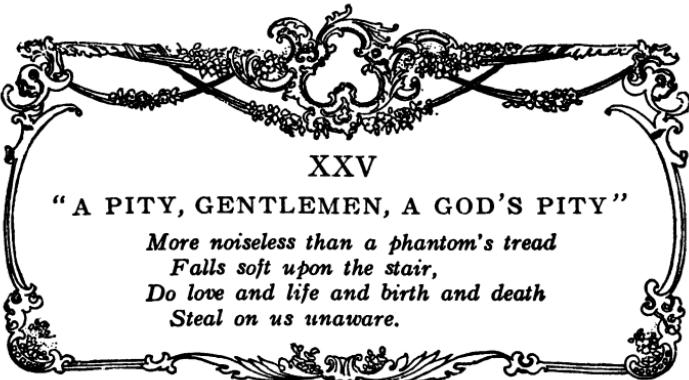
Andrea's lover would die, and no blame could come to Malcolm—he had done his full duty in seeking to settle the affair amicably. Mandeville would sustain him in this.

And Malcolm resolutely closed his ears to that other persistent voice which makes cowards of us all.

Saint-Maurice slept fitfully, for the river's fever had seized upon him, but he fought it off.

Malcolm tossed and tumbled through his passion-tempted dreams.





XXV

“A PITY, GENTLEMEN, A GOD’S PITY”

*More noiseless than a phantom’s tread
Falls soft upon the stair,
Do love and life and birth and death
Steal on us unaware.*

LONG before Saint-Maurice awoke next morning the restless Malcolm had already been abroad for hours. César kept closely to his room, through fear some one might notice he had a touch of fever. The disabled wrist he attended to himself, and to his great joy found he could handle a rapier, but after a very clumsy fashion. Malcolm came by his cabin during the morning. He glanced covertly at the swollen wrist, but did not allude to it. In a fight with d’Ornay, he thought, Saint-Maurice would surely be killed. He only cautioned Saint-Maurice not to go towards the barracks, as the noise of the encounter had already been whispered about the garrison.

“We must keep this as quiet as possible,” Malcolm remarked, as he left and bent his way towards the barracks.

It was true that the affray between d’Ornay and Saint-Maurice had gotten abroad. In fact, one of the

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girls had witnessed their encounter from a distance. She ran straight to Sister Katherine and Julie with the news. And from her description Julie knew it must be Saint-Maurice. Immediately she recalled the sober air he had worn when he came the evening before to speak with Malcolm. And so she more than suspected what was about to happen.

Julie trampled down her first impulse to warn the governor—and lay awake all the night. The next morning she fought the fight over again, and lost, for she went straight to Cadillac's house. At his door she paused, summoned all her resolution, wondered how she could tell it, then returned slowly to her own room.

When Malcolm separated from Saint-Maurice at his cabin he came whistling carelessly down towards the barracks, where he expected to meet Mandeville. D'Ornay, who had already made his rounds, was alone with Mandeville in the most commodious room at the barracks when Malcolm entered.

Seeing them engaged in earnest conversation, Malcolm paused.

“Do I intrude, gentlemen?”

“No, come in,” responded Mandeville, cordially, for he had grown to like Malcolm's direct and gentlemanly manner; “come right in; we had finished.”

“Gentlemen, my errand is simple. In arranging this matter last evening I quite forgot that my principal is suffering from a severely sprained wrist—he hurt it lifting some drift aside in the river. It is very badly swollen and he is in no condition to fight. I have come to suggest that we defer the meeting two or—”

“His wrist was strong enough when he slapped my face,” d'Ornay snarled. “If it be postponed the governor may get wind of it, and we will have no settlement.”

Malcolm looked at him, surprised that he should object under the circumstances.

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"But—" Malcolm began.

"It is already too far off," d'Ornay said, positively.

"I tell you, monsieur," persisted Malcolm, "the man is not able to handle a rapier."

"He should have thought of that when he so urgently called one into play," d'Ornay retorted.

Mandeville looked confused and apologetic, listening to such irregular parley.

"He cannot fight," Malcolm protested.

"He *shall* fight;" d'Ornay answered, surly and vicious.

"In two or three days at most—"

"It must be *to-day*—"

"Then, gentlemen, I offer myself in his stead—my wrist is firm enough." Contemptuously Malcolm flung the offer at d'Ornay.

"And I decline the substitution," that gentleman replied, leaning easily against the edge of a table. Then d'Ornay continued, sneeringly:

"This Captain Crenan has strange ideas of what constitutes honor among gentlemen, to offer deadly affront, then seek to hide behind another man."

Malcolm kept his temper better than he thought possible. "My principal knows nothing whatever of this," he said, very quietly; "indeed, he peremptorily refused to heed me yesterday when I suggested a delay."

D'Ornay's lip curled with an insolent expression of disbelief. Malcolm asked, deliberately:

"Monsieur questions my word?"

D'Ornay merely laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and answered:

"No—oh no." But his manner implied the offensive doubt.

"You desire to fight with a crippled man?" Malcolm inquired, blandly.

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"It seems I can get no fight."

"I offer you a prompt fight myself, monsieur."

"You?" He gazed at Malcolm superciliously from head to foot. "Who are *you*?"

Mandeville had stood looking on, vainly endeavoring to take the negotiation into his own hands, where it belonged, but d'Ornay gave him no opportunity. Now he glanced from his principal to Malcolm, either wondering at Malcolm's control, or uncertain of his courage. Malcolm saw the glance, and comprehended precisely what it meant; his moment was about to come.

Malcolm's tones were earnest, low, deadly. "It matters not, Captain d'Ornay, who I am. You slander the courage of a man whom I have seen tested on many a field; you insist on fighting with him when he is not able to handle a blade." Malcolm's voice dropped lower and lower; he advanced close up to the other, and then threw out his denunciation with the startling clearness of an unexpected shot: "I tell you, monsieur, on that account, you are both a liar and a coward."

A tense, sudden stillness—the stillness that snaps and strains and threatens. D'Ornay flushed scarlet, and sprang up:

"You shall fight."

"Good! I am challenged! I name time and place—at once, here—weapons, these we have. Are you ready, monsieur?" as he spoke Malcolm had flung aside his coat, drawn his sword, and stood all ready in fighting position.

D'Ornay, taken aback by the other's eagerness, hesitated. "But your *crippled* friend," he said, emphasizing the "crippled"; "he has a prior claim. I fight *him* first—he slapped me." D'Ornay was beginning to see the other's purpose, and determined he would not be forced into an encounter like an angry child.

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"Slapped you *only once*, did he not?" queried Malcolm, almost gently.

"Yes, monsieur. Patience of Job! is not once sufficient?"

"Then"—active as a cat, and as quick, Malcolm gave him a sounding box on either ear, leaving a burning cheek, and sprang back again—"there, monsieur, I slap you twice. I have the better—a double claim—to your kind attention," and he hurled the table out of the way and resumed his defensive attitude. With his other hand he pointed steadily at d'Ornay. "If you decline now, my principal does not fight with you at all, and I shall assert my pleasure to chastise you again, when and where I choose."

There was no need for this further taunt. D'Ornay had drawn, and the crossing of their blades completed the sentence.

The two men swung round front to front, lightly, gracefully as trained athletes, eye and point glancing a bright defiance—keen, blood-lustful, merciless; their swift, dexterous play of wrist came mechanically, for their eyes, glowing and piercing, never once wavered one from the other. Round and round, in and out, no sound save the vicious grating of opposing steel, a harder, deeper breath, the creaking of a loose board. Only once did either man look down—Malcolm, lightning-like, to see which was the dangerous plank; then he strove to drive d'Ornay on to the precarious footing.

Mandeville stood guard at the door.

Both men, surprised at the suddenness of the encounter, fought hard but warily, until d'Ornay's quick eye told him the vantage all was his. Malcolm's short-lived and feverish energy gave ground slowly before the other's wiser strength of fighting. D'Ornay had only to wait for a secure and certain victory.

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Round and round the room they struggled, a gathering pallor succeeding the fever flush on Malcolm's cheek. The other bided his time, patiently—calculatingly he waited—he would take no chances, he would kill—*kill*.

Malcolm's brow grew colder, his eyes more blazing bright, his thrust more erratic. He felt the deadly weakness come, and strove to force the fighting while he yet had strength. His guard wavered feebly for an instant, and then—then d'Ornay thrust, thrust through guard and ward and parry, thrust through doublet and shirt, through and through the chest. The hot blood oozed a niggard drop or two, then spouted extravagantly rich and red from Malcolm's purpling lips, and gushed upon the floor.

His blade dropped its point, then it rose again—and fell. He clinched a chair, vainly striving to hold himself erect and die, like a man, upon his feet. He looked d'Ornay steadily in the eye, but his languid arm gave way, and he settled slowly face downward on the floor. A trickling stream flowed from his mouth, gathering a scum of dust as it ran.

"The fool would have it so," muttered d'Ornay. "I did my best to avoid it."

Mandeville bent over the wounded man, half in pride and wholly in sorrow, with the expression of one brave man who sees another die.

"Through and through, d'Ornay," he said; "'twas a death-stroke."

Malcolm opened his eyes to Mandeville.

"Take me to Saint-Maurice—Captain Crenan—I must live to see him." And then the gathered crowd outside came struggling through the door.

The clash of steel had brought many spectators, eager to witness a combat. On the outskirts of the throng stood Nicolette, with staring eyes, shoved

"A PITY, GENTLEMEN, A GOD'S PITY"

aside by the stronger ones who rushed pell-mell to see. Then Vivrot came, the surgeon; and the crowd made way for him.

Malcolm observed the questioning glances on the faces about him. He rose upon his elbow, spat out the blood. " "Twas a fair fight, gentlemen, and no vantage taken. I was the aggressor," he made out to say before the crimson torrent closed his lips again.

"A gallant gentleman," murmured Mandeville; "it's a pity, a God's pity, he should die. Back, men—back," he shouted; "give him air," and he drove the surging crowd in front back on those behind. The room was cleared. D'Ornay leaned in the window. Mandeville held the threshold, the surgeon knelt beside the gasping man and cut the shirt from his breast.

"Poor lad," Vivrot bluntly remarked, "it was a sure stroke. Another such hemorrhage will be the last."

Some one rushing to the commissary for bandages called in excitedly to Sister Katherine, who sat with Julie: "Quick, quick, Sister, to the barracks; d'Ornay has killed Captain Crenan!" This man had not gotten close enough to see who were the combatants; he only knew that the quarrel of yesterday was between these two.

Sister Katherine sprang up, seized a little basket always kept at hand for emergencies, and darted out the door.

"You had better not leave the house, dear," she cautioned Julie. "This is a very turbulent place sometimes."

Julie lifted herself gradually from the chair, her throat choking, her limbs stricken with a sudden torpor. "D'Ornay—killed—Captain—Crenan," she repeated slowly to herself. She groped her way to the door and clutched at the post for support, deadly faint. People were hurrying past, talking excitedly.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"Is he dead?" she asked of one man who came running from that direction.

"I am not quite sure, mademoiselle," the man replied, "but I think he is, or very badly hurt; the surgeon has come away."

Julie gave one glance at the increasing group about the barrack door, and then she outstripped them all in a mad race to where Sister Katherine had stopped a hasty litter which bore the man away.

She forced her way vigorously through the crowd, bent above the wounded man, and her hot tears came in a rushing flood when she found it was not César.

Nicolette, dumb and wide-eyed, stood close beside the litter. The girl saw Julie's flowing tears and slipped a hand in hers; but Nicolette did not weep, for the crushing sorrow stunned her, and she could not comprehend.

"You must not take him to Captain Crenan's," Sister Katherine told the litter-bearers, "he is already ill with the fever. Bring him in here to le Comte de Freret's." In Gaston's bed they placed the wounded man.

There the surgeon gave him a more critical examination, dressed the wound, but held out no hope.

In and out, on tip-toe, came Sister Katherine, Julie, and Gaston. And very soon Saint-Maurice came. L'Enfant followed him to protest against his leaving his bed, but he waved the big fellow aside. Nicolette had heard Malcolm's call for Saint-Maurice, and she flew at once to bear his message. Saint-Maurice came, with cheek of fire and blazing, fever-poisoned eyes, to sit beside Malcolm's bed of death. Nicolette sped back and forth from hut to barracks, from guardroom to commissary, bringing everything for Malcolm's comfort. But they always stopped her at his door, stopped her as a serving-maid, perhaps thanked her briefly for her kindness.

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A serving-maid, a messenger—dear God! her great, unselfish love counted for nothing—nothing to them—nothing to him?

Hours afterwards Malcolm opened his eyes, wild eyes, scorched of fever and of passion. They first rested upon Saint-Maurice, leaning over the bed.

"No, no!" he screamed; "not him! not him!" and Gaston turned away his face, for he knew that Malcolm thought again of that fearful night on the Island of the Tunicas. But Saint-Maurice held him so gently to his pillow, and stroked his head with so soft a hand, that Malcolm grew calm again. Directly he asked the earnest question: "But I did not hurt you, did I, César? Did I?" There was an eagerness and a doubt in the voice most pitiful to hear.

"Delirious," Gaston whispered to Saint-Maurice. César nodded, and soothed the dying man with the tenderness of a woman.

Malcolm held Saint-Maurice's hand clutched in his own. "Leave me with him," he begged, and Saint-Maurice motioned the others from the room. Vivrot, Julie, and Gaston talked in low whispers outside, and Nicolette stood apart, weeping in silence—always apart from human sympathy.

"Come close, César." Malcolm's voice grew low and quivering—already faint with the huskiness of dissolution. "Come close, César—I—I tried to prevent it."

"Prevent what?" For Saint-Maurice knew nothing yet as to the cause of Malcolm's sudden fray.

"The duel, you and d'Ornay; you were not able to fight; they would not postpone it, so I picked a quarrel with d'Ornay—but I did not seem to be strong, and my breath gave out—" César tried to say something, but the quick shock of it, and his own weakened condition, stopped his incoherent thanks which Malcolm hurriedly brushed aside.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"But you won't fight now, César—you won't fight, for her sake—promise me. It was hard for me to do it, César, desperately hard. You do not understand. It seemed at times I was not quite clear in here," touching his head. Then he lapsed into a meaningless babble. Saint-Maurice humored his delirium with a promise, but he did not know for whose sake he had promised not to fight. Malcolm roused and spoke.

"Listen well, César, there is something else—oh, God! I am too far gone to tell it all." A spasm of pain convulsed his face, the blood trickled again from his lips. "See Nicolette—she knows, she will tell you—she—promise me, César."

"Yes, Malcolm, I promise, I will ask Nicolette," and Saint-Maurice soothed him.

And then the deadly whiteness came, the pallor, the shadow of the valley, and Malcolm's hand relaxed its hold.

Saint-Maurice went softly to the door. "Come in, he is going." Then back again beside the bed he sat, while the others came gently in—Sister Katherine, Julie, the surgeon.

"It is the end," whispered the surgeon.

Nicolette, stricken and unthinking, would have come to the bed of death with those other ones, but Julie barred the way and, cruel in her ignorance closed the door in the other woman's face. Julie's tones were kind:

"Do not come in, my dear—wait outside; we may need to send for something. You have been good and thoughtful in our trouble. The poor gentleman is dying." Julie shut the stout oak boards, shut out the whiteness of his bed, the low click of the lock forbade her entrance, and Nicolette, uncomplaining, leaned her chill cheek against the post. When Gaston looked round, the girl sank slowly to the ground,

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pressed her ear close to the threshold across which they had carried him, and listened.

Inside, a flickering spark of strength came to Malcolm; he lifted himself from the pillow. His finger pointed straight ahead, an expression of horror and fear marring the pallid beauty of his face. "See, the throat—the knife glitters—quiet, quiet, he may wake! Look at the mud—the water! Gaston! Gaston!" he screamed, springing almost upright in his bed, "don't take me back; stay with me till morning!"

"Poor, poor gentleman," murmured Sister Katherine. Julie hid her face to shut the pity of it out.

Saint-Maurice stroked his hair and kissed his forehead; and tears, of which the noble gentleman was not ashamed, moistened his eyes. Whether she would or no, Julie watched Saint-Maurice, her heart drawing her to him, but she made no sign.

The end was near. Almost immediately it came. Once again a frightened exclamation, a shuddering, and a reassurance; then the ineffable peace of sure protection spread over Malcolm's face as he crept beneath the loving arm of his friend and felt the pressure of his hand.

Gaston, hearing his name called, came in and stood beside the bed.

"Oh—" Malcolm looked up and smiled. "It's you, Gaston—sitting in the door—sitting—in—the door—" and Gaston knew the dying man thought of that fearful night upon the river island.

Softly, silently, peacefully, out upon the infinite sea of divine forgiveness, his purified soul passed the bounds of human passion's sore temptations.

Julie wept passionately as a child; Sister Katherine passed an arm about her.

"It is over, thank God!" the gruff and tender-hearted surgeon whispered, taxed to his utmost self-control.

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Still Saint-Maurice kept his seat, still held the dead hand clasped in his. He brushed away his tears, leaned over to kiss the tortured lips, and rose abruptly. His firm mouth quivered with unspeakable sorrow. He drew the sheet across the face of Malcolm, and left him to the women.

And Nicolette, crouching at the crevice beneath the door, listened to it all. There was no farewell for her.

"It is over, thank God!" she heard the surgeon say.

When Saint-Maurice spread open the door, letting a great rush of sunlight fill the room with God's warm comforting, there stood Nicolette. She had risen, dauntlessly erect, and gazed at him with hungry eyes.

"It is done," the man said, slowly; and the two women came out.

"Come with us, Nicolette." Julie took the serving-woman, unnoticed the wistful craving of her eyes. "Come, we have much to do."

Sister Katherine and Julie together, Nicolette a few paces in the rear, they went to their own house. There, something beseeching in the girl's manner led Julie to lay a hand upon her head.

"Poor, tender-hearted child," Julie said. Nicolette dropped to her knees, buried her face in the folds of Julie's dress, and wild as the southern April storm came the torrent of her weeping.

"Why, Nicolette, Nicolette, have you never seen death before? But it *was* pitiful; poor gentleman."

Nicolette only wept the more, and clung to her the closer. Julie strove in vain to comfort her.

"Oh, my lady, my lady—he is dead, *dead, dead!*" she wailed.

"Yes," replied Julie, wondering.

"And I could not even be near him."

"But *we* were there—he had all done for him."

"Yes, my lady—but—but *I* loved him."

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"You?"

"Yes, and oh! so many years ago, he loved me." Nicolette felt easier when the truth was told.

"Poor, poor child;" Julie caressed her lovingly, for her own temptation had brought an abiding charity to Julie.

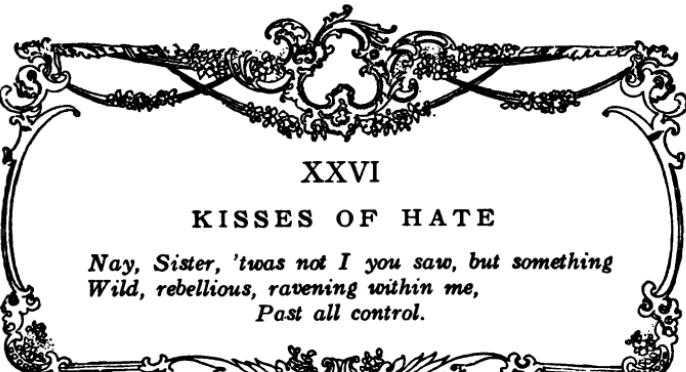
Gently she raised the girl, clasped the serving-woman close to her, and kissed her brow—the first kiss from a pure woman's lips that ever reached across the chasm to Nicolette. At this the tempest of tears broke forth afresh.

"Come, come, Nicolette, there is much for your hands and mine to do. Be strong. Then some day you will sit beside me and tell me of it."

When Nicolette had gone dumbly about her work, Julie sat alone, looked from her window, and thought. Outside, the glorious sun of warmth and light and yellow melody flung a golden brilliance at her feet. Out there beat the tepid heart of the broad, blue bay, penitent of passion, remorseful of the storm. Its lapping ripples sought pardon of the shore, and the mighty quietude beyond forgave its ancient quarrel with the wind.

Secure and restful the island lay in heaped-up, sandy billows, like a spellbound sea of stone. Everything the eye rested upon, every sound that blessed the ear, every note the soul was conscious of, bowed before the Galilean benediction. Peace stretched her shaming hand above them all.

But there was no peace, nor yet forgiveness, in the woman's soul; the bitter memory of her flight from Rougemont kept alive her rebellious resolution. Then Julie dropped her head upon the window-sill, as a weaker woman might, and prayed for courage lest she, too, should forgive.



XXVI

KISSES OF HATE

*Nay, Sister, 'twas not I you saw, but something
Wild, rebellious, ravening within me,
Past all control.*

FROM Malcolm's bed Saint-Maurice tottered straight unto his own, reeling and dizzy. So long as there was necessity for effort, the man's strong will sustained him. Now came the relaxation, which let him down to realize his weakness. The noxious poison of the night filled his veins to bursting, his head seared the pillow.

"The Scorching Death," whispered Big Pierre, awe-struck, to Gaston, as he stood aside for him to enter.

"What's the trouble, César?" asked Gaston, reassuringly, when he came and sat by the sick man's bed.

"Nothing much; more fatigue and heat than anything else," Saint-Maurice answered, weakly; but the fever was there, and could not be hidden.

Gaston went at once for the surgeon and for Sister Katherine. The man of medicine at first thought lightly of Saint-Maurice's malady.

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"A few days' rest, some quinine, keep out of the sun and the night air, will make you sound again," he told Saint-Maurice.

"It is the shock," he said to the others; "don't mention it in his presence."

L'Enfant came, like a great shambling bear, with a woman's gentle touch, to nurse Saint-Maurice. He had grown to love this quiet gentleman.

"You could have no better nurse," assented the surgeon.

As a matter of course, the fatal and unexpected encounter made a great stir at the little garrison. The governor investigated, and it soon developed that other intended meeting between d'Ornay and Saint-Maurice.

The governor acted instantly, and forced a parole from the gentlemen to seek no further quarrel. D'Ornay was held blameless of the death of Malcolm, whose erratic behavior could not be explained. The affair soon ceased to be mentioned.

On the morrow's afternoon they buried the Count of Lautrec—buried him where he perhaps would have chosen to lie, beside the restless and fetterless ocean. They laid him where he might listen in death, as he had listened in childhood, to the murmur and the tumult of the waters.

When dusk had come, and all had gone away, Niclette stole out of the shadows and threw herself across the mound. Men had done their utmost, their sweetest and their worst, for Malcolm. Now the forgetful world passed by, leaving its unremembered dead to his Creator, and to her.

For many days Saint-Maurice, in his cabin, swung back and forth, as swings the pendulum, between the world of men and the world of shadows. 'Twere hard at times to tell upon which side the unmarked border his spirit hovered. Then came the night of the

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crisis. Sister Katherine hung over him, patient, untiring.

Three hundred yards away, Julie crouched on the floor beside her window and fought her indecision. The shawl she had cast aside trailed across a chair and swept the floor, much as the garments of a cringing woman sitting there. It reminded her of herself; she hated it.

"To-night will be the end," she whispered to herself, over and over again. Sister Katherine's reports of Saint-Maurice's growing weakness had brought out strongly all the nobler instinct of Julie—there was no woman's love to watch beside his suffering. Now her insurgent craving dragged her resistlessly to his bed, to smooth his pillow, to cool his brow.

"No, no," she battled with herself, "not now, now it is almost ended. Shame on your weakness, woman." She rose somewhat from the floor. "I will not go to him," she wavered; "but it is a work of mercy, of charity." She stood upright. "It is a mere pretext," she said, bitterly, to herself; for she knew it could be no honest thought of charity which prompted her to go. She hesitated. "No, I will not go." Yet even as she said it she moved uncertainly towards the door.

"I will not," she said again; but her fingers closed round the knob. There she fought again, and turned the key in the lock.

"I—will—not," she persisted, feebly. Julie passed the door and was speeding nervously towards the cabin where Saint-Maurice lay, and the words "I will not" were yet upon her lips.

Again she paused at the threshold of his cabin, and Sister Katherine saw her standing there. The Sister came noiselessly to the door.

"Come in, my daughter," she said, quietly; "I am glad you have come. The surgeon has fallen asleep;

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he is worn out, and I hate to wake him. I must go and mix a potion. Will you stay? The patient is unconscious and will give no trouble." As she was bidden, the other woman took the Sister's place. Julie's eyes were fixed upon the ashen face and tight-shut lids of Saint-Maurice.

"I may be gone for half an hour," Sister Katherine whispered. "L'Enfant sleeps in that cabin across the path; if you need anything, wake him."

She moved softly away, leaving the other one alone beside the restless, unconscious man—alone with a passing soul—alone in the darkness—alone in the face of death—alone to think.

For years this girl had nurtured her humiliating passion in secret and in brooding, longing to crush it, to strangle, to destroy, yet powerless as if it were the murder of a babe.

To this self-forbidden love of hers she gave that intenser maternal devotion which such a woman as Julie might lavish upon a hidden child of shame, a child for which its unhappy mother could find no solace in the past, no honor for the future. She proudly denied its existence even to herself; yet her weakling step sought ever and again the cradle of its concealment, to weep beside it, to pray for strength, but never to plan for happiness.

When other moods possessed her she revelled in its stubborn sweetness, recklessly, wretchedly jubilant, her drear heart crooning its miseries above this unacknowledged child.

This night she sat, keeping her vigils beside the bed of death. It was the end.

She listened to the man's labored breath; it came jerkingly, as if each sigh were sore begrudging him by the King of Terrors. She watched the irregular rise and fall of his breast, the same breast her curls had

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rested upon in girlish confidence. Almost the watcher felt she must lift the infinite veil to peer into his eyes.

Backward her meditations ran, backward to the old clamoring and unforgotten love before these doubts and rankling hatreds came. She pictured his coming to the Cévennes, the birth of her first trembling passion. Then he was young, handsome, smiling, innocent—ay, innocent then, she thought him—honorable, and loving her alone. What life might have brought them both but for her deadly disillusionments she trembled to think, and the hot mists filled her eyes. For the first time in years she trusted herself to look without restraint into his face; it was worn, much older, and calm with sorrows bravely borne. And that scar, that curious scar upon his chin; she wondered how that had come. There was yet another scar, in the edge of his hair. She remembered so well the words he had written her the night before he went to the Eastern wars; she remembered the stinging answer she had returned. Then Saint-Maurice had gone away, and brought back—the scar.

Had she done him wrong? No, no. Dissolute, trifler, gamester, and spendthrift—the love she bore him was her deepest degradation.

Did she love him now? “No,” she answered with her lips, stifling the truer answer of her heart.

She was thinking of it all again when his nervous arm threw aside the covering; it rested bare upon his breast. She gently lifted the arm to cover it again. The first touch of his hand for years sent a fiery glow surging through every vein, a chill, a scorching, and a quivering—and a rushing turbulence of controlless blood. She held his hand, stroked it, bent forward to kiss it, kiss it again and again—it was slipping away from her forever now.

She touched his hair; a wan smile crossed the man’s

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face; the lips almost moved. Julie struggled no more. She leaned forward, laid her cheek to his, pressed his lips lightly, timidly, then, swept from all semblance of control, she kissed his hand, his forehead, his eyes, his lips; kissed him, laughed and wept—and kissed him.

Triumphant in her defeat, glorying in her soul's disaster, the woman gave luxuriantly to his helplessness all that she had denied unto his power. The dikes had burst, the sea flowed in.

At the door stood the astonished Sister Katherine, with the potion in her hand. It was long before the girl beside the bed heard or saw her. The Sister made a movement to slip out again; Julie heard the rustle and sprang to her feet; returning shame overwhelmed her. She held her flaming face away as the other woman came softly through the door.

Good Sister Katherine put up her hand, as if she asked no questions.

But Julie asked: "You saw?"

She nodded "Yes."

"All?" Again the other woman answered "Yes."

"Then forget it. I am a weak woman; he is an evil man. I loved him once, long ago. I hate him now. To-night I was unnerved; it mastered me—the trouble, death, loneliness—forget it."

The good Sister would have soothed her, but the humiliated woman fled from sympathy back to her own room. There she reviled herself until dawn.

In the early hours of morning Sister Katherine returned from Saint-Maurice's bedside. Julie lay awake, but could not meet the gentle charity of the Sister's eyes.

"He is better, my daughter; the surgeon says he will live," she said, as she passed through into her own room.

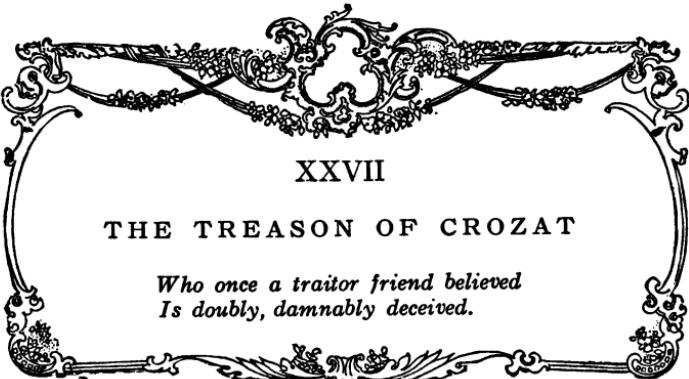
THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

Saint-Maurice would live, and the unbearable thought of having lavished her kisses upon him filled Julie with loathing and self-contempt. Had he died, it would have been different. Then the memory would linger warm upon her lips, priceless as the long, delicious kiss we give in dreams to those who love us not.

But now she felt she could never look the man in his face without imagining there a smile of malicious mockery.

Saint-Maurice grew steadily stronger, and two weeks afterwards removed to his own cabin.





XXVII

THE TREASON OF CROZAT

*Who once a traitor friend believed
Is doubly, damnably deceived.*

AFTER Julie had once opened her arms to Nicolette, the girl clung to her as a little child might cling to its mother's skirts in terror of the dark. Nicolette dared not be left alone except for the twilight hour, which she always spent at Malcolm's grave. And Julie drew much comfort from the presence of this girl, who leaned upon her strength and demanded of her sympathy.

For weeks now Sister Katherine had been directing the women at their sewing, leaving them to the care of Julie while she tended Saint-Maurice in his greatest need. For Julie craved employment, and must keep her fingers busy.

In their large working-room Julie sat apart from the others, with Nicolette close beside her knee, faithfully cutting work for the other women's hands. Bit by bit, and scrap by scrap, Nicolette poured into her soul's confessional the whole story of Crozat and Saint-Mau-

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

rice; she told it tremblingly and timidly, for she dreaded Julie's condemnation even more than the wrath of Saint-Maurice.

It staggered Julie to hear this tale, which made of Saint-Maurice, perhaps, a victim, where she had tried to think him a criminal. Though she could not believe such evil of Crozat, it was not for her to be the judge. Saint-Maurice himself should know.

Julie questioned Nicolette carefully, until the willing girl had given up every mite that she possessed.

"My dear, you must go straight to Sister Katherine; she will take you to Captain Crenan. Tell him the truth."

Nicolette grasped Julie's hand. "Oh, mademoiselle, won't *you* go with me? I want *you* to go." Nicolette stroked the hand she held. "I am afraid to go alone; he is so quiet; he—" and the girl pleaded with her until Julie answered quickly, almost before she thought:

"No, Nicolette, I cannot go; we are not friends; the Sister is better; and you must never let him know I have spoken with you about him."

"Not friends, my lady?" Nicolette looked earnestly at Julie. "Ah, my precious lady, you do not know how he fastens his eyes upon you if you pass. I have been sitting many times on his steps when Sister Katherine would be away, trying to get courage to tell him this. And once, while he was lying there so pale and weak, he saw you through the window. He got up and tottered to the window, and—mademoiselle, was it so very wrong for me to spy upon him, I feared he might fall? But no, he stood there behind the curtain and gazed at you as long as you were in sight—such a smile upon his face, poor gentleman. Then I could hear him say to himself, 'I never thought to see her again; but it would have been quite as well.'"

Julie's shears ran more swiftly through the cloth

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as she listened, and then she must needs bend closer over her work to hide the dimness of her eyes.

“Oh, my dear, dear lady, won’t *you* go with me?”

After much persuasion, Julie forced the trembling girl upon her mission, but Nicolette preferred to go alone to where Saint-Maurice sat in front of his cabin these cool summer evenings.

Speedily Nicolette was back again, in tears and deep distress.

“Oh, mademoiselle, I was so frightened; but I tried—indeed, indeed I did. He did not seem angry. He said it was a very pretty tale, but this Monsieur Crozat had always been his loyal friend and he would hear no harm of him.”

Julie knew that this was about what Saint-Maurice would say to so improbable a suggestion. She found it hard herself to credit the story, but Nicolette told it with such an air of sincerity it convinced the other woman there was some truth in it. Crozat, though, must have some good motive. Julie still trusted him for that.

“Oh, my dear lady, what must I do?” wept Nicolette. “Won’t you go and tell him? He will believe you. I cannot rest until it is done; that is the only thing I ever refused to do for Fifi. You are a lady; Captain Crenan would have to believe you.”

“It would do no good,” replied Julie. “I could not tell him I know it to be true.”

“Yes,” suggested Nicolette, eagerly, “but he knows; he knows well enough it is true.”

Julie had not thought of that. “But he may not believe you to be the little girl; you are a grown woman.”

Nicolette’s face lighted. “Oh, mademoiselle, is that the trouble? I can easily make him believe that, if you will help.” Nicolette, like all women of her

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class, was quick at expedient; her faculties had been sharpened by the harder ways of life. Now she breathlessly laid out her plan. Julie smiled at its simplicity and warmly approved.

"When can you do all that?" she asked.

Nicolette thought a moment. "Wait," and she dashed off to her own room. Immediately she came running back, looking almost happy.

"Oh, mademoiselle, it can be done almost at once; I can dress myself in some old garments I have—he could never tell the difference. They can be mended and made over ready for to-morrow, late." The two women carefully arranged all details, and Nicolette went to work.

Through the night Nicolette's busy needles flew, and queer-fashioned garments took shape beneath her fingers. Julie assisted her, still smiling at the plan, despite the seriousness of it. They had to work unknown to the other women, whose questioning they feared.

At last the work was done, and Nicolette laid the makeshift costume out upon her sleeping-bunk. Then Julie helped her array herself in the queer garb.

"It would not serve for the theatre," Nicolette laughed; "no, no; but here, yes, it is very good." The girl's eyes shone with a pleased excitement.

Late the next afternoon Nicolette dressed for the serious masquerade. Nicolette knew the lonely stretch of beach where Saint-Maurice took his solitary walk at dusk. Together the two went cautiously that way, until Julie would go no farther, but watched Nicolette from a safe place of concealment.

The little actress crept on eagerly, hiding until she got close enough. When she came quite near to Saint-Maurice she cast aside her cloak and ran up to him, holding out a small phial towards the man. Julie mar-

THE TREASON OF CROZAT

velled, for surely that little, yellow-haired girl, her dress to her knees almost, with great, frightened, innocent eyes, full of childish pleading, pouring out her sorrows to Saint-Maurice—surely that could not be the hollow-eyed Nicolette who sat at her knees the whole day through.

If the appearance of Nicolette surprised Julie, Saint-Maurice was completely dumfounded, and stood where he had stopped, staring incredulously at this sudden, unbelievable thing.

“Oh, m’sieu, m’sieu,” Nicolette pleaded, “they won’t let me go. It is only a little way—just there, in that hut yonder—yonder by the great tree. Mother is so ill, so very ill—she may be dead, m’sieu. I have the medicine here in this phial—it will save her life. I have walked since yesterday to fetch it.”

Poor, tired child, so frail and innocent and frightened she looked. Julie held her breath at this consummate acting—for Nicolette threw her whole soul into the part. She came closer to Saint-Maurice, who stepped back a pace as if some unearthly creature had confronted him. In a lower voice she begged again:

“But m’sieu is good, is kind; *he* will let me go to my mother with the medicine—it is such a little way.”

“Good God!” ejaculated Saint-Maurice. “What is this? It’s not possible! You are the child who passed me that night in Ardennes forest—how did you come here?”

“Yes, m’sieu, it is I,” said Nicolette, in her own voice, “and you would not believe me when I told you of it.”

“Why—did—you—do—it?” Saint-Maurice asked, very slowly.

“He paid me.”

“Who?”

“The old man whom they called Monsieur Crozat.”

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"Why should he want it done?" demanded Saint-Maurice, curtly.

"That I do not know, monsieur; he told me it was a jest."

"A sorry jest for me, mademoiselle."

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me. I did not know it was to harm you. Believe me, I did not. I would not have touched a livre of his dirty hire. When I heard you had been killed that night, I left the theatre, left everything, and Sister Katherine brought me here. I implore you, monsieur, forgive me!"

A woman's prayer was more than any wrath of Saint-Maurice could withstand. He patted her shoulder and spoke kindly to her as he had done that night in the forest.

"There, there, little one, it is past. But we must talk of it again. You will come and tell me quietly—will you?"

"Everything, monsieur; oh, I will be so glad to tell you!" The girl's face shone with the joy of her forgiveness, and the hope she might yet do something to repair the wrong.

Saint-Maurice watched her as she picked up her cloak, threw it about her, and returned towards her quarters. Julie need not have feared that Saint-Maurice would glance her way; he never took his eyes from Nicolette until the girl turned the corner of a cabin and passed out of view.

Saint-Maurice walked slowly home; the foundations of belief were crumbling away, for Uncle Antoine had deceived him. He ran over in his own mind all the circumstances connected with the affair—Crozat at the front when it occurred; Crozat arranging all details of his flight, even to procuring this authority from the King and having it ready; Crozat inducing Lafresnie to report him killed. Then came this girl

THE TREASON OF CROZAT

with her remarkable tale so incontestably true; it fitted everything else so perfectly. But why—why?

Saint-Maurice strode determinedly past his own door and made towards the governor's quarters.

Then there came a stormy hour with Cadillac. When Saint-Maurice left Cadillac's presence a full hour later he had been absolutely convinced that Crozat was at the bottom of his present trouble. Cadillac had vacillated and halted; when forced to a direct answer, yes or no, he told Saint-Maurice he would not be permitted to return to France on the next vessel.

It seemed to Saint-Maurice that the time had come when he must act for himself; there was no one whom he could consult, certainly not Gaston, he was too intimate with Crozat; Julie was not to be thought of, and Malcolm was dead. But return to France he would, and that on the very first vessel which came into port. At first it was very hard for Saint-Maurice to determine on a course which left Julie in this savage country. But so long as the barrier of his disgrace loomed up before him, he realized that whether on Massacre Island or in the Faubourg St. Germain, Julie would keep the same immeasurable distance.

So Saint-Maurice laid his plans to get away. He would confront Crozat, settle the truth of this affair face to face, and then—oh, well, there were always wars where a restless spirit like his own could find intense occupation.

For three long weeks Saint-Maurice matured his plans to get away. L'Enfant was shrewd and devoted, so Saint-Maurice called him in and got him to help. The big Canadian laughed, and said he thought the plan suggested a very good one; it might serve. So he set at once about that part of it which was confided to him for execution. When all was ready, they had

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

nothing to do but wait the arrival of the *Baron de la Fosse*, then expected in about a week.

If Saint-Maurice could only have known what had transpired across the sea he would have spent no weary nights devising a means to smuggle himself in disguise on board the next vessel homeward bound. As it turned out, his scheme, so carefully arranged with l'Enfant, had been set up like a man of straw to be knocked down by a most unexpected happening. For at this very time, *Le Seigneur*, Crozat's swiftest bark, specially equipped, was flying westward bearing his recall. So it was that one day, about the first week in July, a slim-bodied sea-bird, flaunting her white sails and whiter banners, folded again her wings in the harbor at Massacre.

It was not the *Baron de la Fosse*, nor yet any of those other vessels for which Cadillac had been watching, but *Le Seigneur*. There was no slow unloading, for she carried no cargo, no passengers.

A ship's yawl left her side instantly, and despatches were conveyed with all speed to the governor.

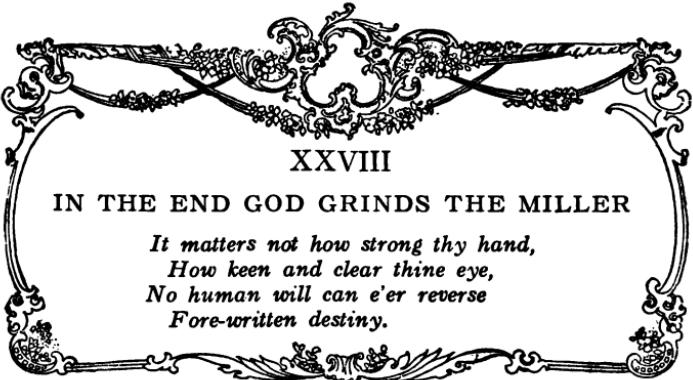
He immediately sent for Saint-Maurice and Gaston.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the Marquis du Chatel instructs me that you are to return to France immediately in *Le Seigneur*. You will make ready."

"And Mademoiselle de Severac?" inquired Saint-Maurice, the thought uppermost in his mind coming first to his lips.

"Returns with you," replied Cadillac.

The speed of joy made their preparations swift. Almost before any of them could quite realize what had occurred, the three stood on the quarter-deck of *Le Seigneur*. The prow of their vessel and the hopes of their hearts turned again towards the shore of France.



XXVIII

IN THE END GOD GRINDS THE MILLER

*It matters not how strong thy hand,
How keen and clear thine eye,
No human will can e'er reverse
Fore-written destiny.*

WHILE the remotest meshes of Crozat's net on the Island of the Tunicas bound Saint-Maurice to a rigid silence, the old spider himself, in Paris, felt the tremor of every strand. But there came a day of breaking which hurled the spider to the ground.

On one of those days while Saint-Maurice lay tossing with fever at Massacre Island, Crozat's shrouded mansion rested in the hush of death. Servants moved about on tiptoe, and whispered apprehensively in the corners.

The door to Andrea's room opened without a sound, and the three most famous physicians in France passed out into the hall-way. They were tired and worn from their long battle with the great Conqueror, and moved silently away from the field that they had lost.

Inside the room a tall, gaunt man, grizzled and unbending, stood motionless beside the bed. His arms

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

hung stiffly at his side, with fingers tightly clinched, his carven granite features perfectly impassive. He stared down upon the pallid face and withered hands folded lifeless across her bosom. Crozat, alone with his dead.

The soft winds rustled at the curtains and stirred to life again Andrea's winding-sheet. But Crozat neither trembled nor spoke.

Within a week Crozat put his shoulder to the wheel again. He expended his tremendous feverish energy in mending the wrongs which he had done for Andrea's sake. His first care, naturally, was for Saint-Maurice, and for Julie, both of whom had suffered.

Crozat wrote a long, explicit letter, which consumed several days in preparation. It gave every possible detail, for the old man could not bear the thought of telling it all to the Duke, or of meeting Saint-Maurice face to face. Crozat sought to excuse himself in nothing; his letter merely told precisely what he had done, and why.

When he had completed this letter he sent for the Duke and placed it in his hand.

"Hector," he said, when the two broken old men were alone together, "here is a letter which I want you to read. It is very full. You are to make no comment whatever upon it."

The Duke sat down, and immediately became absorbed in the astounding revelation which Crozat made. It required an hour for the astonished Duke to read to the end.

Crozat detailed at great length his arrangements for the return of Saint-Maurice, setting out in full the King's order which relieved the young man from any censure for his apparent desertion—everything laid out with such pains and sound judgment that no

GOD GRINDS THE MILLER

taint of scandal could attach to their princely name. Nothing whatever could be added to the letter; it was complete.

The Duke finished, his anger rose; he glanced up.

Crozat had stolen out while his foster-brother was buried in the letter, leaving the Duke to find his way to the street alone.

Immediately his thrill of relief had passed, the Duke's intense resentment grew stronger and more bitter against Crozat; for a blow levelled at the honor of Vernais could never be forgiven by the head of the house. And for the first time in all his life Hector left his foster-brother's door in wrath.

Two days after this conversation, the swift bark, *Le Seigneur*, with a picked crew, crowded sail for the west to fetch Saint-Maurice, Gaston, Julie, and that other one who would never come.

Crozat had fully determined that Julie must return, despite all danger and interference from de Maintenon or the King. The shattered old man craved this girl's companionship, for Andrea had loved her. So he sent with *Le Seigneur* a letter to Julie. The letter told her nothing except as to Andrea's death, and begging that she come home to him.

Deep in the palace of Versailles, honeycombed as it was with intrigue and sordid plotting, there lay a room which, like the ear of Dionysius, gathered to itself the gossip of all the earth. There a clever woman maintained her position by the most astonishing knowledge of what went on about her.

Scarcely a week went by before de Maintenon heard that Julie had been sent for, and the furious woman despatched a messenger at once for Crozat.

The old man came, and to her great surprise frankly admitted her information to be correct, and stubbornly

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

refused her demand that Julie be left in Louisiana a few months longer. Then she threatened, and Crozat smiled his utter indifference to her wrath.

“The King,” she urged, “has not forgotten—”

“Mademoiselle de Severac will decline the honor of an appointment in the Court,” he answered. “I was obliged on the day before yesterday to inform his Majesty of this.”

De Maintenon already knew that Crozat had had an interview with the King upon the subject, but she had failed to learn what passed between them. Madame did not believe that Crozat would refuse the King, wrecking his own hopes and the girl’s. Such a refusal would blast every prospect de Severac might have of recovering her father’s property, and would strip Crozat in large measure of his own overweening influence.

Then Madame very plainly suggested that she might inform the Duke of Vernais what part Crozat had played in the ruin of his son.

“The Duke’s ears are open,” Crozat replied, undismayed; “Madame may do as she thinks best. Saint-Maurice will return upon the same vessel which fetches Mademoiselle de Severac.”

Crozat’s defiant attitude frightened de Maintenon. The old schemer must be very sure of his ground thus to dare her to open hostility. He left the exasperated Madame to reason out for herself what his sudden change of front could mean.

Madame refused to believe it—any of it; the whole thing was a monstrous folly. Crozat was simply lying to her, for he was very sly. There must be some deep design behind it which she could not fathom, and this frightened her all the more.

After years of patient undermining, Madame had succeeded in bringing the King to a state of trembling

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fanaticism; he feared the thunders of the priests, and clung to her skirts for his soul's salvation. In these humors her power was absolute; she had merely to write, and the King would sign. And she meant to keep it so.

When Louis was amused he roused himself at times; so she did not want him amused; it gave her too much trouble.

It seemed that the matter had come to warfare between herself and Crozat, so Madame went to work enlisting her partisans.

Francini, the Italian, had lately fallen into distinct bad odor because of the way he had bungled the King's affair. Yet the fellow could do good service for Madame, and was quite a genius in his way.

She and Francini had a long consultation, arriving at a thorough understanding. Madame bought the creature for a good round sum, then laid out congenial work for him to do.

They spent an hour together until Francini fully mastered his errand—it was simple enough—to watch for *Le Seigneur* at the port of Honfleur, and capture Julie.

Julie de Severac would probably travel straight for Crozat's house in Paris, thence immediately, as Madame believed, to Versailles, in pursuance of some arrangement between the King and Crozat.

Francini was instructed to take a sufficient number of men to overpower her driver and convey the girl, as at first intended, to le Maison l'Ombre, that secluded house near the edge of St. Germain's forest.

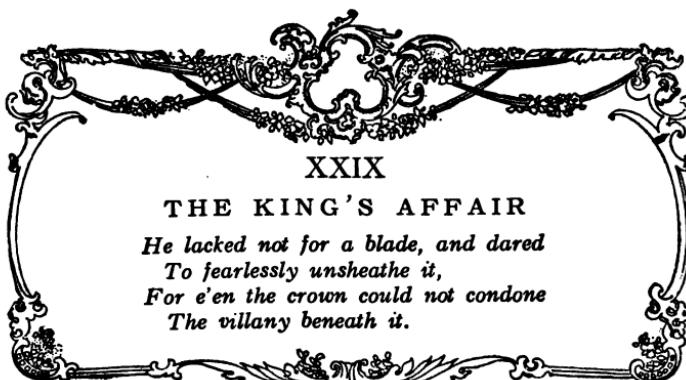
The over-cautious woman drilled her instructions into Francini so that there could be no possibility of a mistake. He at once betook himself to the task of

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

gathering some free-lances to watch the arrival of *Le Seigneur*.

In this wise it came to pass that many conflicting ambitions, many hopes and many fears, centred about whatever might happen after the vessel bearing Julie de Severac cast anchor at the mouth of the Seine.





XXIX

THE KING'S AFFAIR

*He lacked not for a blade, and dared
To fearlessly unsheathe it,
For e'en the crown could not condone
The villany beneath it.*

THE sun was slowly sinking into slumber seas at Massacre when the trim-built bark, *Le Seigneur*, under half - sail, passed out between the islands. Saint - Maurice, Gaston, and Julie stood upon her decks. For when Andrea died, the soul of Crozat's western empire passed away. The peerage of France was never to know a Prince of Louisiana.

Poor, little, inconsequential Andrea, feeble in herself, yet she caused great happenings and moved the muscles of the mighty. Now that her spirit had floated out, as the thistle passes upon the breeze, Crozat's magnificent fabric vanished into dim forgetfulness. The mainspring of the clock had broken, and they who looked only at the dial wondered why the hands had stopped.

The three travellers who leaned against *Le Seigneur's* rail and gazed back at fading Massacre scarcely com-

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

prehended the sudden calamity which called them home again. And when they knew the truth from letters which the captain brought, it robbed them of every whit of sweetness in the thought of France again.

These letters from Crozat and the Duke laid bare the whole wretchedness of affairs at home. With all the finer instincts of gentle breeding, the Duke carefully refrained from mentioning Andrea's love, and the colossal folly which Crozat had built upon it. César was only informed that his own troubles had been righted, and that Andrea was dead. He never suspected any connection between these events. Had he fully understood, the reflection would have added a newer keenness to his grief for Andrea.

Crozat's letter to Gaston warned him over and over again to be very cautious in his guardianship of Julie. The old man did not mince his words, but pointed out precisely the danger that he feared.

In Julie's great distress for the girl she loved so dearly, she dreaded more than ever annoyance from Saint-Maurice during the five long weeks when they must be cooped up together on the same vessel.

But she need not have given herself any concern whatever; the man scarcely spoke to her during the voyage, and then only with the most dignified courtesy. Until his honor was completely cleared, the proud fellow would make no advances which he believed might be repelled.

Only once did Julie feel herself the object of his special attention. She had been sitting for hours upon the deck, watching the slow rise and fall of the rail, a favorite occupation. She glanced round suddenly, and caught Saint-Maurice standing with folded arms intently regarding her. A smile played about the man's lips, and Julie instantly imagined it was be-

THE KING'S AFFAIR

cause he knew that she had come and knelt beside him in the cabin—had kissed him.

The woman's face flushed with indignation and shame as Saint-Maurice turned away. She brooded so constantly on this thought that she felt sure no one could look her in the face and fail to read it there. She even felt glad that Sister Katherine had been left behind—that woman knew it.

The voyage ended. They rounded the rugged rocks of Brittany, threaded the dangerous currents which fretted the Jersey coast, passed the cape of Ste. Anne, turned east towards the mouth of the Seine, and dropped anchor at Honfleur.

For days their luggage had been ready packed; the splash of the anchor had scarcely subsided before they started for the beach.

From an upper gable of the little inn facing the beach at Honfleur, Francini and four other men watched the travellers come ashore.

"That must be the woman," said the thin, wiry rascal with the sharp nose.

"Sure," responded Francini; "it is the woman to a very T, to the very shade of a hair." And he took a well-thumbed scrap of paper from his pocket, comparing his description of her, item by item, with Julie in the boat. But these worthy gentlemen had already abandoned their plan of stopping their quarry on her way to Crozat's. The old man had sent too strong an escort. One of Francini's men had ridden swiftly to Paris with the news. Madame must look to her gentle enterprise in the city.

A messenger waited at the boat for Saint-Maurice, bidding him come at once to his mother. So he bade Gaston and Julie farewell beside the water, and rode immediately to his father's country-seat.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

Perhaps an hour later the other two entered Crozat's coach, bound for Paris. Ten well-armed men escorted them.

Behind this party, at a very respectful distance, Francini followed with his horsemen, not daring to attempt an execution of their mistress's design. But perhaps something might occur to favor them on the road.

Three weeks had gone by, with Julie installed in Crozat's shrouded mansion. She spent her days ministering to the doddering, almost imbecile, man.

Saint-Maurice, at Vernais, read Crozat's letter many times before he understood. He respected the old man's earnest prayer not to come about him—his days were few, to let him die unmolested.

It was already freely given out to the world that Saint-Maurice had gone abroad on a distant secret service by the King's express command. His immediate promotion in the army, made by the King himself, proved this to be the fact.

It also transpired that Crozat had been the unknown purchaser of Châteaunoir, and he had now re-conveyed the property to Saint-Maurice.

Saint-Maurice spent the first two weeks at Vernais with his happy mother; then he grew restless, and longed to join his command at the front.

He visited Châteaunoir and took formal possession, to the great delight of his tenants, though he himself found little pleasure in the thought.

Now he came back to his old lodgings in Paris, three weeks after *Le Seigneur* had sailed into the port of Honfleur.

César sat moodily before his fire; a solitary dinner was over, and Francis moved noiselessly about, clearing away the dishes.

THE KING'S AFFAIR

He was watching the thin, blue smoke curl upward from his pipe, indulging the spirit of contemplative peace.

It was a delicious bit of misery for him to imagine that he cared for nothing; that he, unlike other human creatures, could stand solitary and apart from every earthly interest or affection. So he felt to-night—that nothing had the power to stir his blood beyond its even-tempered flow.

“Arrange my bed, Francis; I will go to sleep.” He went to bed—he did not sleep for hours.

It must have been somewhere near daylight when Saint-Maurice heard the unusual sound of a carriage and many horses in the street outside his door. He went to his window; lights were flickering about; a carriage had stopped in front of the house. Several horsemen were there, perhaps five or six. Two men were supporting a third, who pounded vigorously on his door. Saint-Maurice opened the window and called down, “Who is there?”

“Does the Count of Châteaunoir lodge here?” asked a voice.

“He does; I am he. Who wants him?”

“That’s César, that’s César,” came another voice, so weak and querulous he scarcely recognized it.

“Who is there?” Saint-Maurice asked.

“My Lord du Chatel,” a man replied.

“It is Antoine Crozat,” said another, and Saint-Maurice recognized it for the voice of Crozat.

“Let me in, César; let me in—I want you.” Saint-Maurice himself went down to the door and admitted Crozat, a man on either side of him. Crozat walked unsteadily.

“Are you hurt?” Saint-Maurice anxiously inquired. The old man seemed so frail and worn that whatever resentment César might have felt towards him vanished

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

completely, now that he saw how bitterly he had been punished.

"No, César, I am strong," Crozat replied, in a broken tone.

By the carriage-lamp Saint-Maurice could see his face; he looked as if he might be a decrepit man of ninety; the eyes were sunken far into his head, his skin wrinkled and sallow; the long, thin hair streamed about his face; his hands trembled, and he seemed too weak to stand.

"Come to my room; you are tired."

"No, no, not tired. César, I cannot find her; I have searched all night—she is gone—"

"Who is gone?" demanded Saint-Maurice, with a deadly sinking of the heart.

"Julie—Julie is gone," Crozat answered, helplessly. "Julie—she is gone. Do you understand?" The old man's face wore the vacant expression of one who searches in a dream.

"Gone? Gone?" Saint-Maurice shook Crozat vigorously to make him speak. "Where has she gone?"

Crozat looked at him blankly. "I do not know; I have searched all night. They have stolen her from me; she is my only daughter now."

"Stolen her? Who? When?" Saint-Maurice held him by both shoulders, looking into his face, striving to make him speak intelligently. "Who? When?" he insisted.

Crozat seemed puzzled and stupid. "I do not know who did it," he muttered; "it was early last night."

"Come." Saint-Maurice half lifted him up the stair to his room, sat him down in a chair, poured full a glass of wine, made him swallow it. "Now tell me of it."

Crozat revived under the heavy stimulant. "She went out with her maid in the afternoon for a walk. She was gone late. The maid came home, and said

THE KING'S AFFAIR

they had been set upon in the Luxembourg gardens, and that she and Julie were forced into a carriage, which drove off. They put the maid out of the carriage at the Porte St. Honoré, and she ran home as fast as she could to tell me. I have searched everywhere, César ; I cannot find her. Gaston is gone, and I came to you."

Saint-Maurice questioned him anxiously. "Did the maid know any of the men?"

"No, César, no. She only said they spoke in a foreign language; it sounded like Italian."

Saint-Maurice instantly thought of what Malcolm had told him about the Italian Francini and his chase of Julie to the sea.

"Francini!" he exclaimed; "Francini— By God! it is Francini." All the while he was dressing. Now he armed himself with great care and speed.

"Who is Francini, César?" asked Crozat, in a bewildered way.

"The scoundrel who tried to take her once before, Malcolm told me."

"Oh yes; he is the fellow who brought me the order from the King—I remember him. The order of the King. I did not tell you of that, César. No, no, I have not seen you since. So long as the King lives, César, there will be no peace for my Julie. No peace for Julie so long as the King lives. So long as—the—King—lives—" Crozat mumbled on to himself.

Saint-Maurice was hurrying the childish old man down the stair to his carriage again. Briefly he questioned the men as to the search they had made; a search of the city, nothing found—no trace.

"My Lord du Chatel, these are your men?" Saint-Maurice asked.

"Yes, César."

"Will you let me have them?"

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

"Yes, take them; take them, César. They are good lads."

Saint-Maurice turned to the men—among them was Armand, who had entered Crozat's service. "Will you follow me?" he asked.

"That we will, my lord!" every man volunteered.

"Which is your best horse?"

"This, my lord; he is the freshest; he is but lately from the stable."

"Give him to me." Saint-Maurice vaulted into the saddle. "Come with me—to Versailles."

"To Versailles?" queried Crozat, uncertainly, but making no objection. Saint-Maurice leaned down close to Crozat's ear and whispered:

"Yes, to the King; *this is the King's business.*"

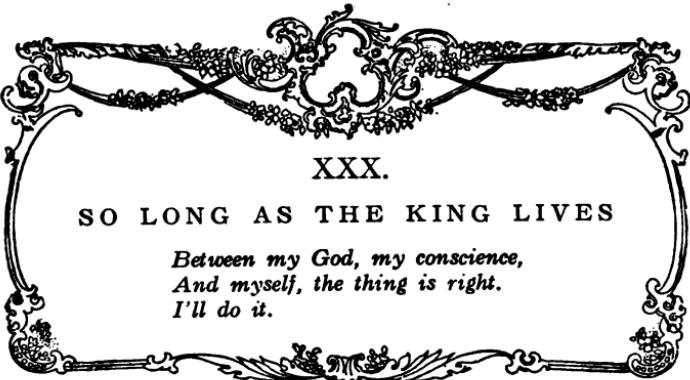
"No, no, not to the King," the feeble old man protested. "No, no, César, you can do nothing—the King—"

Saint-Maurice silenced him almost savagely. "Yes, to the King; I repeat it, this is the King's affair."

Saint-Maurice heard no more of remonstrance from Crozat, for he had already wheeled his horse.

"Come on, lads," he called, and galloped frantically off towards Versailles.





XXX.

SO LONG AS THE KING LIVES

*Between my God, my conscience,
And myself, the thing is right.
I'll do it.*

THE first day of September—Sunday; a chill, moist morning, with the gray mist heavy, and the wind blowing strong in the riders' faces. These horsemen thought not of the wind; they spared neither man nor beast.

Four sturdy fellows followed the Lord of Château-noir upon his mad errand. Nearest his elbow rode Armand, the Norman, who had followed Saint-Maurice from Rougemont to Switzerland. The burly fellow delighted to ride again in the train of his rightful master.

Saint-Maurice's head whirled as he took horse for Versailles. The flippant gossip about Julie which he had heard on every hand goaded him to a desperation, the more maddening because it seemed to come from nowhere, and there was no person whom he could hold responsible, even had he the right to meddle in an affair so delicate.

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

Deep in the Mississippi forests he had learned from Malcolm how this same wretched Italian followed Julie to the coast, armed with authority from the King. Ever since that night Saint-Maurice's fingers yearned and burned to catch the insolent reptile by the throat.

And now it lashed him to an ungovernable fury that such a loathsome creature as Francini should have stolen her from Crozat's house of death and sorrow.

Exasperated beyond his cooler judgment by the miserable tales which de Maintenon's creatures had circulated, and thoroughly misled, Saint-Maurice rode directly and without concealment to their very fountain-head, to the man of men in France.

Whatever the purpose he had in mind he said nothing of it. He had some dim notion of forcing himself into the presence of the King, by the right of a French seigneur. What then? Verily he did not know; he did not question himself. But see the King he would.

For a thousand years the blood of Saint-Maurice had flowed in the veins of loyal gentlemen, and the hereditary instinct was not to be lightly overthrown. They always looked to their monarch as the touchstone of honor, the mirror of chivalry. The word "King," hedged with all its glorious divinity, had been for ages their slogan on the field, their toast around the board. And now this knightly hearted gentleman, clean in spirit and in faith, refused to taint the purity of his father's worship with such a crime as this. The thing was not—it could not be true.

Straining up the hills, clattering down the hills, galloping through the muffling forest stretches, winding along the streams, hurling the loose stones right and left, on and on, jolt and jostle, start and stumble, on and on and on they rushed. Saint-Maurice thought more swiftly as his pace grew brisker.

SO LONG AS THE KING LIVES

Refuse as he might to believe this horror, he could not forget that this King *had* been guilty of many such. Saint-Maurice thought of poor de Bragelonne, and spurred his horse the harder. Even Armand began to fall behind.

What if the King would not heed him? What if he turned contemptuously from him, as he had done from de Bragelonne? What if he even taunted him? The courtiers would laugh at him as he passed. The thought was maddening. Saint-Maurice clinched his teeth and spurred his horse again. The poor beast leaped forward in frantic bounds. Armand dropped far to the rear. Saint-Maurice quieted his pace a trifle; but still his mad thoughts whirled furiously on ahead; he must think, think, think of all these things. What if the King should deny him any redress? There would be no appeal, none under heaven. Saint-Maurice almost stopped his horse. Crozat had said, "So long as the King lives there will be no peace for my Julie." "So long as the King lives"—it rang in his ears. Then came the goading, stinging thought of Julie, a prey to such human vultures. And there was no help for it "while the King lives," as Crozat said. No, there was no appeal from him, except—to the King of Heaven. And Saint-Maurice spurred his horse on and on, heedless that the animal must break down before they reached their journey's end.

Then he slowed his gait and thought: "By the God of Heaven! why should he live?" For the first time to a Saint-Maurice came the wish that his King might die; and the idea came back and back, in new forms, until he grew accustomed to it. The slow-gathering crescendo of his wrath brought him, shivering at his own treason, again and again to the point, "*Why should the King live?*" Saint-Maurice would not hesitate to kill any man for such cause; would

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

hesitate no more than to crush a venomous serpent with his heel. His knightly honor would command it, his knightly conscience would command it, the God of his knightly worship would forgive it. He had slain d'Hercourt for less. If there was no other way to save Julie; if—if—and Saint-Maurice spurred his horse again.

Never had a Saint-Maurice lifted voice or hand against his King; never had the bar-sinister of treason smirched their fair escutcheon. He shrank and cowered at the thought, and leaned far forward upon his horse's neck.

But why should it be treasonable? Surely a gentleman owed some duty to his God, some duty to his love.

Saint-Maurice had loyally disbelieved all stories of Louis unworthy his kingship, but now he came face to face with this, and knew that his race's idol could crush a helpless woman's honor. Great God! and that woman *was Julie*. For one instant she came back to him again, as at Rougemont, her curls nestling next his heart, her face glorified with love, her soul with purity—the intervening years were all forgotten. He clinched his teeth, became quieter, paler, perhaps, with a deadly, dangerous pallor, and dashed more madly forward.

Faster and faster he rode, faster and faster he thought; the blood coursed hot as the wind blew cold.

Would he go like a feeble, mewling babe, make his tearful plea before a wanton king, be laughed at for his very earnestness, then be derided by a crowd of silken-garnered fools? Would he whimper, whine, and slink away? No, by the precious blood of Christ! no, not he; it was not the way of the Lords of Châteaunoir. He looked with clear, direct eyes upon the task before him. He would make a dignified appeal, in the right

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of a seigneur of France. If that failed, then — God forbid that such a cup be placed unto his lips!

The mightiness of his purpose consumed every tingling nerve and every atom of force. He saw nothing except the path in front of him, the work which lay ahead of that.

If he clinched his teeth the tighter, if his breath came quicker, it was not through doubt, nor fear, nor indecision.

He turned now into the straight road to Versailles. He did not even notice that he and his party were not the only early riders on the way.

They met a strange and straggling cavalcade. Frenzied horses foamed and fretted under the lash; women screamed at their laggard coachmen. From the palace, and to the palace, both ways, they rode. But the steadier, the more frantic stream was that which bulged out of the entrance gate to the palace. The torrent of people squeezed out, like water from a spout, and scattered in all directions, as a fountain before the wind.

Saint-Maurice did not heed these other travellers. Some were lackeys riding for their masters; some were messengers for hire; some the great nobles and fine ladies, desperately bent upon their own affairs. These affairs were nothing to Saint-Maurice; he kept his own side of the road, and plunged steadily on. The throng grew thicker on the road, in rank disorder; they considered not the dignity, but the swiftness of their flight. He saw all of this, but it had no interest for him.

Once Saint-Maurice had to turn aside and leave the road altogether; a carriage had broken down, and two others had piled upon it. Beside the wreck, cursing like a madman, his dainty silken stockings dappled with mud, raged the Duke of Lauzun. It must have been a terrible excitement to rouse him so fiercely from

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his fashionable indifference. Saint-Maurice only observed him sufficiently to guide his horse safely past the confusion. The one absorbing purpose of his soul drove every other thought away. He must reach the King—then Julie.

Over the hill yonder was the great gate to Versailles, flanked by its hideous sandstone images. Had Saint-Maurice been less intent upon his errand, he must have observed the quarrelling, rushing crowds about the gate; noblemen, fine ladies, broken carriages, soldiers, *canaille*—all in one seething tangle.

Carriages were hastily driving off; wagons being filled with rich hangings, pictures, bric-à-brac, everything, and clattering away.

Excited groups of men clustered round. Saint-Maurice heard but did not heed their anxious questionings—“Is it Maine, or Orleans?” The words “Maine,” “Orleans,” “Madame,” “Villeroy,” were on every lip, dinging at every ear, except Saint-Maurice’s. The word in his ear was “Julie.” He had but one thought, and held fast to that; these good people were nothing to him. He reined his horse at the gate to let Armand overtake him. Saint-Maurice threw Armand his bridle. “Wait here with the men,” he ordered.

Freed of his horse, Saint-Maurice walked towards the gate, splashed, muddy, his hair awry, his cheeks glowing from the fresh morning wind. No sentinels were on guard; the men in silver and blue mingled with other lawless plunderers.

Passing swiftly through the court-yard, Saint-Maurice picked his way among the groups of people, avoided the great heaps of household wreckage, and went steadily on to the door of the inner apartments.

Here, as at the outer gate, there was no guard, no discipline. Chaos, tumult, undirected confusion ev-

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erywhere, as if the bond which bound these human fagots had been suddenly broken. Saint-Maurice entered the door unchallenged and strode rapidly towards the apartments of the King.

Passing de Maintenon's royal quarters, Saint-Maurice did not observe that they were dismantled, bare except for a few piles of odds and ends in the middle of the floor, packed for removal. The serving-women wrangled over the spoils. One of these women shouted: "Madame gave them to me; she has been gone to St. Cyr these three days. She gave me all in this room." Saint-Maurice had no ears for this; he pressed on. But he remembered it all afterwards.

At last, more fortunate than he dared to hope, he stood unhindered before the door-way of his King. There was no sentry at the door, no symbol of power.

Once before he had passed that very threshold, flushed with boyish pride, to receive his monarch's thanks. Then there had gathered at the entrance a brilliant throng of the noblest and the best in France. This glorious recollection stopped him a moment.

In spite of himself, his resolution wavered; he thought of what he meditated—how the deed would ring round the world and consign his name to infamy. What mattered it, this shallow judgment of a shallow world? In his heart he was justified; all else was chaff. Then he thought of Julie, and his heart grew strong again.

Rigidly he stood; the very silence, the desertion of the place, oppressed him. He hesitated; the door was not tightly shut; he could hear a cautious moving round within, the opening of an inner door—departing footsteps. Then a chair was knocked down, a table overturned—so it sounded—and many people running—running away. Two richly dressed men brushed out into the hall-way past him, leaving the door agape.

Then he heard something else. Diminishing all

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other sounds, there came a low quaver of pleading, no shadow in its tones of the imperious Bourbon :

“Oh! oh! will nobody succor me?” A cry for help, and *from the chamber of the King!*

His head dizzy with the confusion, Saint-Maurice half drew his sword and rushed in. Everything was in wild disorder. A table and chair overturned; a forgotten cloak, draggled and trampled, lay on the floor; the King’s bedroom, and forsaken!

Whence came that cry? He looked more carefully around; no one in sight. In the distant rooms he heard steps, running away—dying away. The curtains of the bed were closely drawn. There was a slight rustling behind them.

Then Saint-Maurice remembered that it was only about eight of the clock; the King had not yet left his bed. The royal sleeper rested easy.

But where was the morning throng about the Bourbon couch? Where the valets, the princes of the blood, de Maintenon, Orleans, Maine, veiling their hatred by the most profuse politeness?

Saint-Maurice had no time for deciphering riddles or prying into the affairs of other men. The time for him to act was here; an unhoped-for opportunity had come. Yet upon the very brink of action he halted, as Satan might have halted before he raised rebellious hand against his God.

Saint-Maurice hesitated a single instant only, for time pressed and his needs were urgent.

“Julie will have no peace so long as the King lives.” Crozat’s distressful cry still rang in his ears, and found some echo in his voice.

“Sire!” he called, in a tone he vainly sought to make respectful. The King gave no response.

“Sire!” he repeated; still the imperious Louis vouchsafed no reply. Saint-Maurice persisted.

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“Sire!” he called, much louder, advancing a pace towards the bed; another pace, another, until he stood beside the couch; he grasped the curtains of the royal bed.

Ages of hereditary deference stayed his hand and bade him pause; but mounting impatience fought it down. A narrow space he separated the curtains, and looked within. The King was there, asleep. Listen! listen! No! There was no breathing, no tremor, no—and Saint-Maurice flung back the curtain, searched the monarch keenly in his face, passed a hand across his brow, warm yet. He laid another hand upon the heart—no flutter there—it was still.

Great God! the King; but—the King—was—dead; dead, and forsaken!

Motionless, with scarcely more of life than he, Saint-Maurice looked down upon the princely Bourbon, upon a level now with the lowliest serf in all his broad domains.

Saint-Maurice had rushed in so impetuously that he thought more of his sword than of his hat. And so, wearing yet his sable plumes, he stood, covered, before his King. And while he gazed upon the pinched and pallid face, all his wild rebellion vanished, all the gathered storm of indignation passed away, all the fiery vehemence of passion—all, all was gone.

Awed by the solemn majesty of death, slowly, reverently his hand arose, and slowly down again it trailed his waving plumes upon the floor. Saint-Maurice bared his head before his King.

A thousand years of knightly faith, of loyalty and honor, like a conquering flood swept over Saint-Maurice—grief, remorse, and a proud affection for the man who had so long personified all that was glorious in France. Silently Saint-Maurice regarded the imperial clay. The greatest of the Bourbons had fallen, and a mighty hush brooded o'er his palace of Versailles.

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Gradually, through the intense stillness, Saint-Maurice became conscious of whispering voices beyond the bed—conscious, yet inattentive. Absorbed he stood, and watched, and waited. Then the voices came in distinct words. Saint-Maurice shrank a little closer into the curtains and listened.

“Now is the surest time,” one of the voices said; “no one is there.”

“Are you sure he had it?”

“Yes, only an hour ago it was in his breast; Rohan saw it.”

“Come, then; be quick.”

Saint-Maurice listened, but did not stir, only to draw the curtains closer about him.

Two men entered, one going quickly and quietly to one door, one to the other, locking them deftly, and turning together towards the bed. They were hurried, uneasy, and nervous; fearing, and locking out interruption. Two fashionably dressed men of middle age.

Saint-Maurice stood half concealed by the bed-curtains and watched them intently. Noiselessly he had drawn his sword, a rough, strong blade—the very blade with which he had determined, if need be, to kill his King; and as he drew he thought of that, and smiled—smiled gladly that he should turn it to another use.

The two men, having barred the doors, turned towards the bed, and for the first time caught sight of this other man standing there. His whole attitude was a calm menace, a warning against any attempted plundering. His bearing required no explanation. There he stood, and the bulwark of his presence bade them stop. Muddy and draggled from his ride, his garments splashed and rent, his uncombed hair tossing wildly about his face, Saint-Maurice was not a man to be encountered carelessly. And they realized it. That

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was a long and ugly blade he carried, and the fellow seemed a man who might know how to use it. No man moved, no man spoke. Then the elder of the two intruders broke the silence.

"What are you doing here?" he questioned, in the voice of a man accustomed to command.

"Standing here," answered Saint-Maurice.

"So we see; do not trifle with us, we will brook no meddling." Saint-Maurice did not have to say that he would brook no meddling; they could see he was not to be wantonly aroused.

"Move away; we have business here," the elder man commanded, arrogantly.

"What is your business?" coldly asked Saint-Maurice.

"With the King."

"The King is dead, and you will not touch him except in presence of his officers."

"We are his officers," both replied.

"Your names, and rank?" Saint-Maurice asked, quietly. They looked confused, unwilling to give their names.

"Where did you come from?" the elder man inquired again.

"From the hall-way."

"What is your business here?"

"As you see it." He stood at guard. They tried him once more.

"We have no time to talk. Move out of our way before we call the guard," and they made a step forward, but the steady blade and strong arm behind it halted them short.

"You may call the guard," Saint-Maurice replied, but did not drop his point. He was willing to talk; some one would surely come directly. They changed their tactics.

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"Do you want money? We will pay—"

"No," he answered.

"Who are you?" one of them asked.

Promptly he replied, as a man who did not fear to give his name: "César de Saint-Maurice, Count of Châteaunoir."

The men looked at each other, for they both knew the reputation of this quiet gentleman. Then they asked again: "My lord, what brings you here?"

"To protect the King."

"By what authority—"

Quick and cold the answer came; Saint-Maurice looked them straight in the face:

"By the ancient right of a Saint-Maurice to defend the kings of France."

His answer was complete, his right undeniable, and his sword vigorous to enforce the claim.

There was no dealing with such a man, and the others knew it. They could not fight with him for the din of it—and the danger. Then they eyed each other restlessly until footsteps began to be heard in the inner chambers. Saint-Maurice suggested:

"Would you gentlemen kindly unlock the doors you fastened awhile ago?"

They glanced at each other; there was nothing else for them to do. Then they sneaked to the doors and softly turned the keys again.

Fagan, the physician, Cardinal Rohan, and the priests came in. These two worthy gentlemen, who would have robbed the dead, were loudest of all in bewailing the death of their great and glorious King.

In the gathering throng Saint-Maurice slipped away unnoticed. He stopped for a moment at the outer door, then thoughtfully walked along the corridor.

As he passed the balcony he heard the royal officer

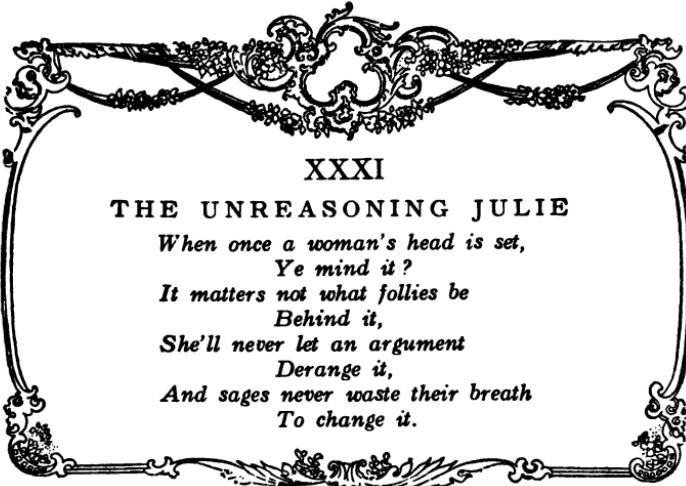
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call aloud to the crowd below, who, like a hive disturbed, never ceased their buzzing:

“Le Roi est mort. Vive le Roi.”

And the kingly baton was broken in the presence of the people.





XXXI

THE UNREASONING JULIE

*When once a woman's head is set,
Ye mind it?
It matters not what follies be
Behind it,
She'll never let an argument
Derange it,
And sages never waste their breath
To change it.*

THE house, conceived in crime and builded on the
fickle favor of princes, had fallen.

“So long as the King lives,” muttered Saint-Maurice to himself, recurring unconsciously to the train of thought dominant when he entered the room. Passing outward through the same door, the same ideas unwound themselves again, as thread unwinds from a spool. He walked out slowly, undecided, this unlooked-for occurrence having thrown him into a maze of bewilderment, and he did not on the instant see the far-reaching effect of it.

“So long as the King lives,” he repeated to himself, absently. “But—the—King—is—dead—” he said again, trying to impress this mighty fact upon his own mind.

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But—and Saint-Maurice stopped stock still; his heart stopped; his reasoning faculties stopped. Then, as seething waters suddenly released, blood, body, and brain bounded on again at the realization.

On the morning ride he had spurred his horse; now he spurred his own laggard flank, and almost ran, in the effort to keep pace with his frantic inward energy.

The King no longer lived. De Maintenon had fallen, and all who clung to her in her strength, or supported her intrigues, were crushed beneath the ruins.

Saint-Maurice was actually running now, as he grasped the potency of the changes which had come to France, and to him.

Through the hall he hurried, dexterously threading his way between wrangling servants contending over plunder, out beyond the court-yard, into the open Place des Armes. He was dazed yet, his one thought being to find Julie. When he did find her it would be a simple matter to release her, for he would meet enemies on an equal footing with himself, not men made sacred by the protecting glamour of the crown.

Perhaps she had been brought to Versailles, perhaps carried—God only knew where.

Like a tethered charger listening to the bugles, Saint-Maurice fretted and fumed at the ignorance which tied his hands. Yonder were four stout fellows; much could be done with them if he only knew where to apply their strength.

Saint-Maurice was standing on the foot-way of the Place des Armes, heedless of the noise and confusion all about him. There was a greater confusion in his mind.

He saw many men he knew—and women—all striving desperately to get away and save what they could from the wreck. Yes—and suddenly he saw some one else. A carriage drawn by two sleek, fresh horses

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had rattled up to the curb; the press at the gate was too dense for its passage. The door opened and Francini stepped out daintily, with a perfumed handkerchief in his hand. "Wait for me here," he said to the man on the box. The dapper little Genoese stopped to question some one about the unusual stir, when, swift as a hawk on a sparrow, Saint-Maurice pounced down upon him and caught a firm grip in his collar.

Francini wilted as rank weeds wither at the cutting when he felt that strong hand at his throat.

On the instant Armand sprang to his master's side, with a broad grin, his huge hands itching to catch hold of this powdered rogue.

"Put him in the carriage, Armand." Francini was tumbled into the carriage, head first, at once, effectually if not deliberately.

There was so much confusion everywhere that no one noticed Saint-Maurice's *coup* or cared about it.

Saint-Maurice beckoned his men.

"Get down," he commanded Francini's driver. The fellow demurred, and was forthwith jerked from his seat.

"Armand, you drive with Grancy; the rest of you follow horseback. Cast the extra horses loose." Saint-Maurice gave his directions briefly, then sprang in beside Francini and called to Armand: "Take the Paris road."

After Armand had extricated them from the crush of vehicles, Saint-Maurice called again, "Turn down there," pointing to a quiet and deserted side-street. He wanted to get free of the turmoil. When they were well out of the way, he had the carriage stopped. All this while Francini cowered abjectly in the corner, limp and lifeless as a rained-on fowl. Saint-Maurice shook him up.

"Francini, you know what I want. Guide me to her."

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"But, my lord, I do not know," he began, whimpering.

"So much the worse for you. You must guide me straight to where you have taken the lady, and quickly, or—"

Francini shivered in terror at the glitter of Saint-Maurice's eye. "No, my lord, no—"

"Do not lie to me; no matter if it was done for the King; he cannot protect you now; he is dead—this morning."

"The King dead?" Francini ejaculated. "But it was not done for the King," he was surprised into saying.

"So it *was* done, was it? Which road? Quick. Then we can talk at leisure as we drive. Which road?"

"And if I tell?" the Italian eagerly questioned.

"Then you go free when the lady is free. Otherwise, understand me, Francini—I shall kill you in this carriage, and you will never be missed. The King is dead, and Madame has fled from Versailles. You saw the uproar this morning. No one will ever think to search for you."

"Madame fled?" repeated Francini, stupidly trying to comprehend.

Saint-Maurice pressed him mercilessly. "Yes. Which road? Which road?"

The Genoese shivered again at his menace. That blue vein in Saint-Maurice's forehead was beginning to swell; he looked dangerous.

"Which road, Francini?" he asked, with a tone of finality which brought an answer.

"Marly," mumbled Francini.

"Take the Marly road, Armand, fast," Saint-Maurice ordered; and they started. Saint-Maurice leaned forward and forced his guide to look him squarely in the face.

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"Are you sure it is the Marly road, Francini? Mind that you make no mistakes." He looked as if he was in no humor to pardon an error.

"Has the King sent her to Marly?" Saint-Maurice questioned, thinking it odd that Louis should make such use of Marly.

"No, it was not the King," Francini sullenly replied.

"Not the King? Who, then, was it? Madame?"

Francini looked surly and stubborn.

"Was it Madame? Answer me," Saint-Maurice insisted.

"Yes."

Saint-Maurice felt relieved; he hoped this was true, for it meant that Julie was in no imminent danger.

"How do you happen to serve Madame?" he asked the Italian.

"She pays me better," Francini answered, grown desperately truthful.

"She will never pay you again. She has probably left France before now. It is wiser for her, if Orleans becomes Regent. It is wise, too, for a gentleman with your peculiar talents to follow her example. Your talents have rendered you exceedingly unpopular. Some one might spoil a good blade on you. There are many to whom it would be a delight."

Saint-Maurice let Francini consider his proposition a few moments, then asked him, determinedly, "Where did you take this lady?"

The wretched little coward sank down lower in the corner and replied—replied as a miser giving up his gold, but still replied: "Maison l'Ombre."

"It belongs to Madame?"

"No, to Count d'Aubigné."

"But Madame selected the place?"

"Yes."

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“Where is the Count d’Aubigné?”

“I do not know.”

“Did he have any hand in this matter?”

“Not that I know of.”

Francini was answering his questions grudgingly but promptly, as a well-trained child.

“Where is this Maison l’Ombre?”

“On the road to Achères.”

“Nearest route?”

“To Marly, thence by Saint-Germain northwest through the forest; turn to the left before you reach Achères.”

“Never mind, Francini; you will show me when we come to it,” and Francini knew he would be obliged to point the way. “How far is the house?”

“Seven leagues from here.”

It was now about nine o’clock in the morning. Saint-Maurice glanced out at the sun. “Good; we reach there by noon. Now, my dear Francini, we have more leisure to talk; pray tell me, how is the lady guarded?”

“Two old women.”

“No men?”

“No men,” Francini answered, as briefly as he could.

“Is the house defended?”

“It is a very strong house.”

“Can you gain us an entrance?”

Francini writhed, but admitted that he thought he could. Saint-Maurice settled back comfortably and fell to looking out of the carriage window. Thanks to the very excellent horses which Madame kept, they arrived at the outskirts of Marly in about an hour.

“Which way, Francini?”

“The Saint-Germain road.”

“Road to Saint-Germain, Armand,” Saint-Maurice called out of the window.

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A half-hour more and Saint-Germain was reached. Saint-Maurice merely looked at Francini again.

"Take the northwest road through the forest—no, not this one; this is the Loges road; farther to the left, take that."

Their way, for an hour, led through the beautiful forest of Saint-Germain. The leaves were just beginning to turn, and a few even were fluttering to the ground, peacefully, quietly, as though the forest lay a million leagues from the turbulence of Versailles.

Saint-Maurice's impatience looked only to the end of his journey; he saw nothing beside him but Francini.

It had come nearly to noon when Francini began to glance occasionally out of the window, then to observe the way carefully.

"This way," he said; "that little road past the thicket—there, that is right." By his directions they had turned into an unused path, barely wide enough to travel; it led nearly directly west to the verge of the forest. There they turned again.

What had once been a narrow road, now entirely untravelled, slunk away between two ragged stone fences. Saint-Maurice, impatient as he was, noticed details in the crumbling stone, fallen down in many places; the owner was not an industrious farmer, he thought. The house lay a quarter of a league farther on.

"Here is the place." Francini spoke.

A rambling old château of brick, neglected and tumble-down, with a large, tangled garden all about it. A grove of enormous oaks and cedars, with dense underbrush, long untrimmed, almost entirely concealed the house itself. It was well named the "Shadow Mansion."

They picked their way along the walks grown knee-

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deep in grass, struggled through the weeds to a side door, under Francini's guidance, and rapped—rapped again and again. No answer. Every window was tight shut, and the doors were of the stoutest oak.

“You are sure, Francini, this is the place?”

“Yes, my lord, yes.”

“You brought the lady here yourself?”

“Yes, my lord,” he confessed.

“Well, you must find means to get her out, or it will be much the worse for you. Call the women.”

Francini strained his lungs shouting, but the house was grim and silent as before. Saint-Maurice became suspicious of the ominous old place; he determined to waste no time.

“Who is inside, Francini?”

“Two women only.”

“Are you sure, Francini?”

“That is all who were here this morning.”

“Was any one expected?”

“Not that I know of, my lord; no one knows the lady is here. I had my orders two weeks ago, but could not get her here before last night. I have never had opportunity even to report to Madame.”

“In which room is the lady confined?” Saint-Maurice asked, looking up at the windows.

“It has no outside window, my lord.”

“A dark room?”

“No, it has a skylight.” Saint-Maurice walked around the house, taking Francini with him.

“Examine all the doors, my lads,” he said to the men. “See if we can break one down.” He consulted Francini. “Which is the weakest door, Francini?”

“I will show you, my lord.”

He carried them to the rear of the house and pointed out a small door, commanded by two windows, with solid shutters above. Saint-Maurice glanced up at

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these. A man firing down from one of these windows could easily defend the door against any attack.

Saint-Maurice turned to Francini. "We are going to break down that door. If one of my men is hurt, or if you have deceived me, you will be the first man to die. You take charge of him, Grancy; if a shot is fired from that house, *kill him first.*" Francini's nerves hung on the ragged edge of wreckage.

They managed to tear a considerable beam from an out-house.

"Here, bear a hand, Francini," Saint-Maurice ordered him.

The six of them, with right good will, poised the beam and rushed against the door. It creaked and shivered. At the second trial, the beam crashed on through and made a way.

Saint-Maurice shoved Francini ahead.

"Come," he called to the others, and they followed him cautiously into the dark and apparently deserted building. They stumbled through the cellar. Half seeing, half feeling, they groped their way through the lower floor, examining all the rooms which were open. Some were locked. No human creature there. Everything still, ominously still, threateningly still. Then came the stair-way, dark, narrow, and with two sharp angles. The men paused undecidedly at this. Saint-Maurice, in front, whispered, "Come on, men." They slowly followed, carefully, step by step, listening. It led to a broad, upper hall-way, with a grated window in the farther end, which dimly lighted the corridor. Crouched in the distant corner, as much in shadow as possible, were several figures, hiding.

"Come out of there," Saint-Maurice called, levelling his pistol.

"Oh, monsieur, monsieur, don't shoot!" and they unsteadily rose, standing trembling in the light. Two

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stout, muscular-looking, revolting old hags they were, and Saint-Maurice could well see why it should be deemed quite safe to intrust Julie to their unscrupulous attention.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," they implored, "don't kill us, don't kill us!"

"Hush, you old fools; are there any men in the house?"

"No one except us!"

"And the lady?"

"No, no one else. There is no lady." They called upon all the saints to witness that there was no one else in the house.

Saint-Maurice dragged Francini out again.

"Which room?"

Francini pointed to a door which was closed.

"Where is the key to that room?" Saint-Maurice demanded, in low tones, of the women.

"I don't know, monsieur; there is no one there. It's a store-room."

It seemed from its location that it was a room without windows.

"Open that room," he bade them, sternly.

"Monsieur, monsieur, there's nothing there; we have no key; it is lost."

"Grancy, Raoul, search them."

Two men were searching them in very short order, and their investigation being not of the gentlest, one of the women reluctantly disgorged the key. Saint-Maurice fitted the key to the lock and shoved open the unwilling door. He found a plainly furnished room, lighted by a skylight, no windows, admirably suited for such a purpose.

The thick walls had effectually muffled every sound, and the first that Julie knew of any one being near came from the rasping of the key in the lock.

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Erect in the centre of the room, underneath the roof light, stood Julie, calm and self-composed. Her hands hung beside her; she was watching the door being opened—Julie, dignified, silent, contemptuous.

Her eyes fell first upon Saint-Maurice, then upon Francini. Francini was smiling, glad that nothing had occurred to jeopardize his own precious neck.

That was what Julie saw—Saint-Maurice and Francini, side by side.

Forgetting everything in his joy at finding her safe, Saint-Maurice rushed in towards her, but before he spoke she drew back from him in utmost scorn.

“So it is *you—you—is it?*”

“Yes, it is *I—I, Julie*,” he cried, triumphantly yet doubtfully, not understanding the meaning in her tone. “It is *I, Julie*; quick, quick; come, we must go.”

“We must go?” she repeated. “Why? Where?” she asked, coldly.

“Yes, quick; leave this wretched place.”

But she held back. “And so you have descended to *this*,” she said, slowly, every word keenly edged and cutting him to the tenderest quick; she retreated farther into the room, Saint-Maurice following her.

“Come to this?” he echoed, just as slowly.

“Yes—to—*this*. I did not dream even *you* were so wholly lost to shame.”

“So lost to shame?” the bewildered man repeated after her.

“Yes; sending me to such a place and using such vile tools as that,” Julie pointed to the slinking figure of Francini.

The Italian tried to sneak out of her sight, but Grancy barred the way. The other men shifted about uneasily at such a totally unexpected reception, and looked questioningly to Saint-Maurice.

“Back to the stair, men, and wait,” he commanded

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them. "Grancy, you hold that fellow." And the men gladly shuffled out of their awkward situation. "Now, Julie," Saint-Maurice began, but the torrent of her denunciation overwhelmed his attempts to explain. The gathered tempest of years hurtled from her lips.

"I knew you for a gamester, a low reveller of the wine-shops; I knew you were cruel, cunning, cowardly. I knew all of this many years ago. Men might praise your courage, but *I* knew better. When that foul wretch d'Aubigné came to Champfleur"—Julie shuddered, and her lips refused to name d'Aubigné's errand—"you met him there, and rode away with him."

Saint-Maurice raised a hand in determined protest; he might as well have whistled to drown a hurricane.

"Now I find you here with your little beast, Francini, another fitting companion for the noble Saint-Maurice of Châteaunoir."

Saint-Maurice grew pale under her lashing, pale with rage, every spark of manly resentment being roused. He opened his lips, but Armand came running in and said, excitedly:

"Pardon, my lord, a squad of horsemen are coming down the hill yonder, coming directly here. This road leads to no other place. There must be twenty of them."

Saint-Maurice ran out with the Norman and looked from the window. Quite a little company of horse were winding down a hill some quarter of a league away. It looked as though they wore the colors of de Maintenon.

"Who are these people, Francini?" Saint-Maurice demanded.

The Italian shook his head. "I do not know," he replied.

"Are they Madame's people? Don't you dare lie to me."

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“I do not know.”

“You told me you had not yet reported to Madame that this lady is here?”

Francini nodded.

Saint-Maurice had no time for parley. These might be Madame's people, or only a band of plunderers who were always abroad in times of public commotion. He could not wait to see.

“It will be a full half-hour before they can get here,” suggested Grancy. “The way is steep and winding.” Saint-Maurice thought an instant and decided. He called Armand and Grancy to one side.

“Gag and bind Francini and these old women. Do not hurt the women. When this lady leaves her room lock the others in it. They must not tell tales too soon.”

The men smiled, and almost immediately the smothered screams of the women and Francini told that their work was being done.

Then Saint-Maurice returned to Julie.

They were alone, and he came close to her, his old love shining in his eyes. Julie misunderstood the man, and shuddered at the love-light which had been her girlhood's pride.

“Julie, Julie, do you think that I—”

Julie laughed; not a laugh of merriment, it were bitter irony to call such sound a laugh.

“Julie, listen to me; listen for your own sake. I have ridden hard to reach you and take you from this awful hole—”

“Then why did you select such a place?” she scornfully interrupted.

“Julie, you persistently wrong me; I love you—”

“Hush! how dare you?” and he ceased. Her whole figure bristled with a fiery anger. “How dare you profane that word?”

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Saint-Maurice saw that it was useless to reason with her in this humor, and every minute became important. But he tried over again.

"Come, come, Julie," he pleaded with her, earnestly; "it is dangerous here; we *must* go."

He pressed closer to her, sought to take her hand and use kindly force. She shrank farther and farther away into the darkened window recess.

Saint-Maurice was desperate—time flew by.

"Julie—Julie—"

"Mademoiselle de Severac," she corrected, positively, but he was in no mood for trifles.

"Crozat sent me here to take you from this place. You are losing precious time. You *must* go."

"Must? I tell you I will *not*," she answered, decidedly.

"I cannot leave you in such a place as this. Come, we have time to reach Paris before night."

"Then you drive alone, Uncle Antoine will find me."

Saint-Maurice's patience was gone.

"Do you mean that you prefer remaining here to going with me?"

"Assuredly. I am older now than I was at Rougemont."

Saint-Maurice colored, and clinched his hands; there was no reason in the woman now.

"Julie, Julie, do you know—"

"Too much," she answered. For Julie had one idea firmly fixed in her mind. She had been carried away by Francini and d'Aubigné and placed in that room the night before, guarded by those hideous old women. When the door opened in the morning, the first man she saw was Saint-Maurice side by side with Francini.

Saint-Maurice looked at the resolute woman and did not argue with her any more.

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He stepped to the door and called for Grancy; Julie could hear every word.

"Open one of the lower doors; the lady is ready. Bring the carriage; we leave at once."

Saint-Maurice was alone with the defiant and stubborn woman; gently and respectfully he told her:

"Julie, you *are* going with me. Am I to use force?"

"If you choose, monsieur; I am a woman—I will not go."

"My men are here," he said; "shall I call them?" and he attempted to take her by the wrist.

"Do not dare touch me!" she commanded. "Am I a prisoner?"

"You *are*," he answered, decisively.

"Then I will go; *but do not lay your hand on me!*"

Walking proudly, deathly pale, Julie left the room.

"Is there anything here you desire to take?" Saint-Maurice asked.

"No, I brought nothing."

The carriage was ready. Grancy and Armand sprang to the box. Saint-Maurice offered to put Julie inside. She repelled his assistance and got in alone. Saint-Maurice took the front seat within, and they drove off.

"To Poissy," Saint-Maurice called to Armand. "It's a better road."

He knew the Poissy road—the main thoroughfare from Paris to the west. It was his route from Château-noir to Paris.

Julie sat in the corner, silent and contemptuous; when he addressed her she neither listened nor replied.

Rapidly they passed through the lane and struck the broader road; Poissy lay on ahead.

Saint-Maurice had suffered much these last few months; he had endured more. Now he writhed under Julie's misjudgment. It maddened him to find his motives so totally misunderstood, and it lay beyond

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his power to explain, for this woman stubbornly refused to listen. Opposite him she sat, her head sunk in the corner, defiant and disdainful. With all possible power over her, he was utterly helpless.

The day's excitement put him in a frame of mind anything but docile. If he took her to Paris and left her at Crozat's door, as he first intended—that would be the last of it all. She would never believe anything except that Saint-Maurice had been the confederate of both d'Aubigné and Francini.

The thought aroused another quality in Saint-Maurice which had never yet shown itself to this woman. She would know him better before another day had gone—a grim, determined, and resolute fellow who did not stop at trifles. He fully made up his mind that when he spoke to her again he would compel her attention. Until that time came he could be quite as silent as she.

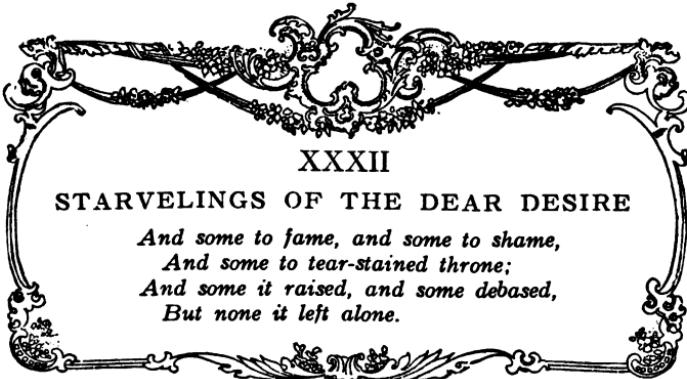
At Poissy, Saint-Maurice alighted. He talked apart with Armand. Armand grinned. Saint-Maurice gave Armand his purse. The Norman lad chose the best horse in the lot, and set out immediately at top speed towards the west. He knew every post-boy on the road to Châteaunoir, and went ahead to arrange relays. Then Saint-Maurice talked with Grancy. The horses were comparatively fresh, the roads were good, it was two in the afternoon.

"Yes, my lord, it can be done to-night," Grancy assured him.

Saint-Maurice, with tight-shut lips, re-entered the coach. The stubborn prisoner had not taken the slightest apparent interest in his movements, and Saint-Maurice offered her no explanation.

The door closed with a sharp snap; the coach wheel-ed, turned its back on Paris, and struck a rapid pace to the west.

Saint-Maurice had taken the road to Châteaunoir.



XXXII

STARVELINGS OF THE DEAR DESIRE

*And some to fame, and some to shame,
And some to tear-stained throne;
And some it raised, and some debased,
But none it left alone.*

IT was near two in the afternoon when Saint-Maurice's carriage left the Poissy road and headed directly west. Julie had become so confused by such a number of windings and turnings that she lost all idea of direction. She believed herself to be about four hours from Paris at the house where Francini left her. But she asked no questions of Saint-Maurice. Even had she been inclined to talk, it was his turn now for silence. Despite her courage, Julie grew frightened.

Hour after hour sped by; relay after relay awaited them; there was no abatement in their speed and no sign of pausing. A supper ready prepared was handed in at Louviers; she left it untasted on the seat beside her. She heard a man outside call the name of the place, and knew then that she was some twenty leagues west of Paris. She had once been to Louviers.

Saint-Maurice sat in the diagonal corner and gazed

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fixedly from the window. In the few glances she stole towards him she could gather no hint of his purpose through the impassive mask he wore.

Julie grew more and more indignant at the outrage, and her wrath waxed hotter at his calm quietude in the conduct of it.

Then night came slowly on, and still they flew westward. The horsemen rode steadily at their door; the road became more and more deserted as the distance to Paris increased. All the night no word passed between the stolid travelling companions inside the coach. Shifts of horses were made like clock-work, and with but slight delay, for the stable-boys along the road were Armand's friends, and he carried a generous store of coin. In utter silence these two watched through misty panes the flying of the road; hours and hours of darkness and road, and thumping hoofs and straining wheels.

Morning glimmered, and the sun rose behind them. Julie knew they must be many leagues from Paris, and going steadily west. Still the stern-faced man on the front seat gave no intimation as to whither they were bound. He began now to note the familiar paths of his childhood, and about nine of the clock Armand called in at the window, "Which gate?"

"By the great gate," Saint-Maurice answered; he was master now at Châteaunoir.

The watchman saw the carriage from afar and had Petion, the warder, summoned. Saint-Maurice leaned out of the window, but his orders were unnecessary, for the glad warder was already tugging at the gate.

They halted a moment while the huge gates clanked and swung open. The steaming horses dragged them up the steep-paved way into the court-yard and drew up before the main door to the château. The lord of Châteaunoir sprang out. He stood in the house of

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his fathers, a French seigneur, absolute in his own domains.

“Châteaunoir, mademoiselle,” he told Julie, simply. She glanced about her without a word, and kept her seat. The servants were gathered round, and two women, fresh and kind-looking, a mother and daughter, seemed specially to be waiting the orders of their lord.

“Come, mademoiselle,” he said to the girl; she did not protest; did not reply. He had opened the carriage door and stood beside it, hat in hand.

“Come, mademoiselle,” he repeated, and without even so much as glancing at him or receiving the slightest assistance, she alighted from the carriage. Saint-Maurice gave brief orders for the care of horses and men, then whispered to the old serving-woman: “My mother’s room; and look well to her needs.” Then he stood calmly and courteously watching her face, and waiting for her to enter the house. Not a sign she gave; she did not seemingly note his presence. The servants looked from one to another; it was a strange home-coming for their young master.

Julie entered the house. Saint-Maurice halted a moment on the steps, and as he did he saw Petion nervously running up the old, emblazoned flag along its naked pole. The long pennon untangled, shook itself joyfully, then fluttered out, a writhing streamer of red, with the visored helmet in its centre. For the lord of Châteaunoir had come to his own again. Saint-Maurice could not repress a thrill and a tear. In a moment his thoughts came back to what lay before him.

“Has the *abbé* arrived?” he asked of Armand.

“He is in the study, as you ordered, master,” the Norman lad replied.

“And Aunt Eleanor?”

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“She is with him.”

Then Saint-Maurice went in, as a child might go, to speak with his old friend *l'Abbé* Paul—the white-haired, great-hearted priest who had always been the confidant and apologist of his boyhood.

“God bless you, my son!” The overjoyed priest strained him to his heart, and Aunt Eleanor kissed him as she would a little boy. But the old brother and sister felt the chill of the shadow which lay upon him, and cut short their voluble welcomes. They had watched from the window his arrival with the silent lady, and knew it was no happy bridegroom they were summoned here to greet.

“What is your trouble, my son?” the old man asked, with that sweet directness which never yet failed to draw all the truth from Saint-Maurice. It did not fail now. He told them everything.

For a long time the fatherly priest listened, sometimes shaking his head in mild disapproval, sometimes nodding and smiling as if to say his boy had done well. But he was sore distressed when Saint-Maurice ended his recital. The old man thought awhile, then came over to him and kissed his forehead.

“You have done bravely, my son; may God prosper you,” he said.

“Now, father, you and Aunt Eleanor wait here until I send for you; it may be some little time.”

Saint-Maurice despatched old Madge to ask that the lady see him in the room adjoining the one she occupied. The nurse came back.

“She is waiting, master,” and her master turned his face towards Julie’s door. The old nurse looked wistfully after him, as though her love longed to know what this queer matter meant, and why her boy was troubled. But he went straight to the door and knocked.

On the morning before, this very man had halted at

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the threshold of his King, and paused for resolution before he entered. So much had happened since that this had been forgotten. Now, with less of courage, he halted ere he opened the door which stood between himself and the lady of his dear desire. He hesitated, knocked, and knocked again. She would not bid him "come." Then he entered the room.

It was a large, handsome, old-fashioned apartment, where the family had been accustomed to assemble. Three huge windows to the east, very close together, gave it a generous, glowing brightness. A heavy table and low chair stood near the windows. This comfortable seat had attracted Julie.

She looked down upon the riotous roses in the garden, and beyond them to the mingled panorama of field and cliff and sea. She did not raise her head as Saint-Maurice came into the room.

He gazed down at her for one uncertain moment, then came straight towards her, standing close beside her chair.

"Julie"—he was looking down intently into her face; the girl seemed tired; she had not eaten nor slept—"Julie, has Madge given you all attention?"

"I required nothing," she tersely replied, receiving no favors at his hands.

"Julie, I have long desired to talk with you uninterrupted; there is much I would tell you. Will you listen to me now?"

"I have no choice."

"Julie, Julie, do you not see—" There was one thought dominant in the woman's mind, and she broke in upon him with :

"Am I free?"

"Yes."

"Then I choose to leave here at once," she said, decidedly.

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“But you must listen,” he urged.

“If I must, then why do you consult my wishes?”

Saint-Maurice was provoked and helpless; he walked over to the window for a moment. Like the woman, his eyes rested on the same spread-out vision of garden, field, and sea. Then he nerved himself for an ordeal; he resumed his place in front of her calmly, as if he intended to narrate some occurrence of ordinary interest. His voice was low and steady, full of power and control.

“Be it as you say, if you force me to it; for the time you are my prisoner, and must hear me.” Julie’s fierce rebellion stormed within her, but she said nothing.

“You will hear me through to the very end. For years you have persistently wronged and misunderstood me, and denied me every chance to explain. All of this I bore without resentment—that is true. I bore it without resentment because I believed I deserved it at first. But your denunciation of yesterday is past a gentleman’s endurance. No man could speak to me as you did, and live.” The girl kept looking far away, paying not the slightest attention, except to show her impatience. “Did you really mean to say, Julie, that you believe I had any part in carrying you away from Crozat’s?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “Does it not seem so, my lord? Did not Francini and d’Aubigné, your boon companions, take me away. Did you not come promptly with Francini to the house where he left me? Did you not bear me away from there against my will and fetch me to your own house? Am I not even now your prisoner?”

“Yes—but,” he stammered, confused at this chain of happenings, so logically strung together.

“Then go on,” said Julie, contemptuously, “if I am forced to listen; perhaps you may call in your good

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friend Count d'Aubigné to help you, or that little, perfumed creature who brought you to me yesterday—you are generally in their company."

"Do you mean?" Saint-Maurice was genuinely angry, and started to protest, but his pride revolted at making defence before such a tribunal. He made no denials, and determined to ask her nothing until he had finished what he meant to say. He began:

"Yesterday morning, before daylight, Crozat came to my lodgings, with a half-dozen men. He told me you had been carried away, that he had searched all night and could not find you. I thought it was on account of the King," and Julie's flush showed that she, too, had thought of that. "I rode straightway to Versailles, with the men who would follow me. I saw the King in his chamber; the King was dead."

Julie betrayed a spark of interest and relief at such a mighty happening.

"Coming out of the palace," he continued, "I met this fellow Francini, alighting from his carriage. Once before he had been sent in the Soubise carriage to fetch you to Versailles. Malcolm told me of it in America."

Julie's face flamed; she looked at him straight. "How dare you?" she demanded.

"Julie," he answered, regretfully and positively, "it is time to speak the full truth between us—once. I knew that this Francini had tried once before to take you by the order of the King. Malcolm stopped him near St. Malo. So when I met Francini at the Versailles gate I took possession of him and his carriage, believing he could show me where you were. He was our pilot until we broke into the house and found you. I brought you away—"

"Against my earnest protest; it was a brave deed for five men." Julie had become so obstinate that no reason could appeal to her.

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“Yes, I brought you against your will,” Saint-Maurice admitted, without apology, “and would have done so against the will of any one. I could not allow you to remain in such a place.”

“I prefer it to this,” she said, coldly, pig-headed, and intractable beyond the reach of argument. And yet, somehow, it seemed as if it were but a mask of ice she wore to hide a slumbering volcano.

Julie was a grown woman, a pure woman, and much was at stake. Saint-Maurice would not mince words with her.

“You did not know where you were,” he said.

She betrayed no curiosity, only shifted her hands wearily.

“Do you know where they took you?” he persisted.

She did not move a lash.

“Well, it was to one of those pretty, retired mansions built for seclusion and prayer, when that was the fashion—formerly the *petite maison*, made infamous by Count d’Aubigné. I could not leave you there.”

Julie flushed and trembled; she had heard the fearful reputation of the place.

“Great God, Julie! why do you force me to tell you these things?”

“I have made no inquiries of you, monsieur,” she replied, icily. For a while neither of them spoke; then she asked, very slowly:

“Why did you bring me here instead of taking me to Paris?”

“Because you doubted me.”

“And to win confidence, my lord, you compel me to accompany you—you hold me prisoner one entire night in your carriage, and keep me here at your castle, I know not for how long, against my will?” Her face was fiery and her tones withering.

“Because you would not listen to any reason, Julie;

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because you doubted and wronged me; because for all these years I have sought to tell you the full truth. Because I knew if I took you to Crozat you would always believe evil of me." As the man spoke, his manner changed, his face softened, his voice grew musical with tenderness,

"Because I loved you then, Conchita; I love you now, Conchita." The old love-word he used to call her by now slipped unconsciously from his lips. "Conchita, little Conchita, I brought you here that we might understand each other. Surely a man can fight with any weapon for his own life—for what is dearer." He did not need to raise his voice now to make her hear; he was almost whispering. "Conchita, Conchita, sometimes I think I must love you beyond my own powers, to feel no pride before you, to forget everything, and yesterday to forget my loyalty to my King."

Beneath the folds of her dress a slim hand trembled at the sudden sound of the old, beloved name—so many years had passed since he called her by the dear little Spanish word. Julie wavered, but Saint-Maurice blundered on, and set her at defiance again.

"For this I brought you here even by force, made you my prisoner for a time. If you love me you will forgive it; if you do not love me, then it matters little."

Julie instantly recovered her composure and her resolution at this reminder that she was under duress. Heedless of the injury he had done his cause, the man went on:

"Away back in the Cévennes I loved you, loved you truly, Conchita. To my eternal shame I failed you when you needed me. I allowed d'Hercourt and the others to taunt me into cowardice. Conchita, I was young, a mere boy, and so fearful of derision; you know nothing of men like d'Hercourt; you cannot appreciate their power over a lad like myself. It is this

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I have always wanted to tell you, but the story sounds stale and craven.

“When you fled from Rougemont—I mean to tell you all the truth—I returned to the château. D'Hercourt and his bullies taunted me again at your running away. I killed d'Hercourt,” Saint-Maurice said, very simply. “He was my colonel, the offence was death, and I had to leave the army. I have seen you look curiously at this scar; d'Hercourt gave it. Then I searched the world for you, and found you in Switzerland. You refused to let me tell you of it then, and your friends derided me. Years went by, in Turkey, Greece, Africa, then I saw you again in the great hall at Versailles. I learned, no matter how, that—that—that the King—that you were in danger. I went to Champfleur. D'Aubigné had already arranged relays to bring you away by night. When he came to spy about, I forced him to ride back with me to Paris. You taunted me for riding in his company. Then I went—no matter why—to Louisiana. Thank God, all that trouble has passed away!”

Julie knew this whole story better even than Saint-Maurice, for Crozat had told her without reserve. And she knew that in this matter at least she had wronged the man.

“Night before last,” Saint-Maurice continued, “Crozat came to tell me that you had been stolen; Crozat knows what I have told you is the truth. Forgive me, Julie, if I appear to recount my own doings, but you oblige me to it.”

The girl forgot her wrath for the moment and wondered if all this could be true.

He was leaning forward above the woman, who listened in earnest now. He was telling her his cowardice, his pitiful weakness, his contrition, and Julie shivered. For Julie recalled a pale, suffering

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face scorching on its pillow, a rough-board hut, and an arm thrown nerveless from its coverings; she recalled her own tempestuous passion, her kisses. And now in this man's castle of Châteaunoir she felt again the same overpowering impulse; but she was a prisoner; his eyes would look straight into hers if she dared raise her own; so the woman made no sign.

Saint-Maurice bent closer to her; she was almost won.

"Conchita, Conchita, do you forget the little glade at Rougemont in the days when I needed no defence before you?"

Julie's resolution was slipping away, the clouds were coming to her eyes, her heart beat so thunderously she feared that he must hear it. But he changed his tone, and roused again every spark of antagonism in her nature.

"Now," he continued, dropping the remorse, the humility of his bearing, standing proudly before her, "I was wrong first; for this I have humbled myself to the very dust before you. Yesterday, after I had risked everything to do you a service, you denounced me before my men—denounced me as a spendthrift and gambler—you did not know that I gave up this castle to save my brother's honor; you denounced me as a duellist and a murderer, because I had killed the man who wantonly insulted you; you denounced me as a coward—that alone was true. You denounced me for my association with Francini and d'Aubigné, when it was done to guard your safety. To tell you this, I brought you here, even as my prisoner."

That hateful word, and the knowledge that she was wrong, fired Julie's resistance all anew.

Saint-Maurice walked over to the window and stood looking out; Julie glanced towards him. There was a calm power in the man's attitude which she resented—resented because she felt so weak herself.

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He turned and came slowly towards her; in spite of herself she trembled.

"And there is one other thing, Julie, I meant to tell you." He looked down upon her gravely. "Conchita, you loved me once, and forgot; I love you always, and remember. I remember the rough bench in the mountains, remember every kiss you ever gave."

Julie cowered to think of the night at Massacre, and wondered if he knew of that.

"When we were in America I said nothing to you—perhaps you know why. Then I had nothing to offer you but my poor excuses, and you would not have believed. Now I have come again into my own, and can give you everything."

Julie quivered and hesitated, for she knew the test was coming.

"You distrust me still, Julie; you show it in a thousand ways. But think, have I not always been respectful? You are my prisoner here, I am lord and master in my own castle; have I so much as laid the tip of my finger upon you? You think, or thought, me guilty of this last outrage; is that reasonable?" He pointed upward to the portrait of a sweet-faced woman above her head. "This is my mother's room; she looks down upon me—upon you; I feel no shame before her."

Julie did not demand again, "Am I free?" She was nervously smoothing out the wrinkles of her dress and looking at the floor.

Suddenly he stopped before her. "Neither will I lay the tip of my finger upon you now. Julie, you are free. My carriage stands ready to take you where you choose. You may go—" He stood directly in front of her; she took no step to leave. "Or, Julie—little Conchita—you may remain here forever, my own dear wife, the Countess of Châteaunoir. I loved the

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little, brown-cheeked girl; I love you even more tenderly now, for both of us have suffered. I have told you the whole truth, and if you leave me now of your own free will, I pledge my honor never to trouble you again."

Bravely Julie struggled. "Then," she mastered herself to speak, "I am free to leave your gates a shamed and discredited woman, a—you force me by this—"

"Hush, Julie." Sternly he silenced her. "In that next room yonder waits the purest white-haired man that the good God ever sent into this world—the priest who baptized me.

"He and his sister wait there for your protection. If you choose to go, they will ride with you to Crozat's—wherever you will. The choice is yours."

Proud of his manhood, his untarnished knightly honor, there was no cringing, no supplication, no abasement in his voice.

"Your prison-doors are open." He walked to the door, threw it broadly open, and stood to one side, leaving her way clear.

His eyes were fixed calmly on her. The man had done his duty, his full duty, to her and to himself, and the clear conscience of him made his eyes more bright.

Julie stood now at the window, for she had risen as Saint-Maurice spoke. From one resolution to another the woman vacillated.

Once at Massacre, when she thought him dying, she had given way to the storm of a temporary impulse, and bitterly reviled herself; now she would be strong. When he pleaded his weakness she would have given him strength, but when he was strong she defied him.

His words "prison-doors" rankled in her heart.

Julie rose and stood.

It was scarcely a moment until the woman turned slowly, holding herself straight as the poplar-trees

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outside, and without a word, without a glance at the man who held the door, she passed out of the room into the entry—passed out of his life into the great world beyond.

Proudly composed as she, Saint-Maurice said to her:

“Wait one moment, mademoiselle; Father Paul and his sister are to accompany you. The King’s death may be the cause of some disturbance along the road.”

He went inside to call the *abbé*, and Julie’s eyes rested upon him again. For the first time there was an air of doubt, of uncertainty, about the woman. But it was too late now to repent. Saint-Maurice speedily returned with Father Paul and his sister.

“Mademoiselle de Severac returns to Paris; good father, will you see that she comes to no harm?”

Julie dropped her eyes while the old priest gravely regarded her. She felt abashed before him, and felt that he knew it.

“Armand, call the carriage and the escort,” Saint-Maurice ordered. In a very few moments the carriage swung round, followed by a dozen well-armed horsemen. Saint-Maurice himself courteously opened the carriage-door. Julie entered, Aunt Eleanor beside her, then Father Paul. They were ready.

Saint-Maurice waved them a grave farewell. The carriage slowly descended the rough-paved hill, passed out through the great gates, and was gone—gone. He watched until a bend in the road hid Julie from him.

Saint-Maurice had fought on losing fields before, and was not the man to falter. He wheeled and walked steadily back to his door. This was the end. He had lost. But his honor was clear; he had been true to his knightly faith. Outside the door he paused, and shivered at the great, deserted house into which it

THE SIEGE OF LADY RESOLUTE

opened. He strode into the echoing hall and looked back.

Saint-Maurice turned his head and drew a quick breath; the carriage was coming back. It was toiling up the hill and had already come inside the gate. The lord of Châteaunoir waited, and opened the carriage-door. Father Paul clambered out, knotting his puzzled brows; this was an exciting experience to a man of placid life. Then Julie alighted, holding her face away.

"The mademoiselle wishes to speak with you," explained Father Paul; "she has forgotten something."

"Mademoiselle is welcome." Saint-Maurice inclined his head with simple courtesy.

The door stood open. Julie led the way into the house, and went deliberately to the same room where Saint-Maurice had held her prisoner. She went to the window where she had stood and listened to him. Then she turned and glanced at the door which Saint-Maurice had left open.

"Shall I close the door, mademoiselle?" he inquired.

"If you will be so good."

Julie now glanced at him once or twice, attempted to speak, and nervously tugged at her glove. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes downcast, her voice came not at all. Why was he so maddeningly silent? Why did he not help her? Saint-Maurice only listened; he had done all that man could do.

This was a different Julie who now stood before him; not the defiant, superbly disciplined creature who had swept past him a few moments before. Again and again she lifted her eyes to his and dropped them to the floor; Saint-Maurice never wavered in his steady gaze. And then she tried again to speak, in a voice so low he had to lean forward to catch what she said.

STARVELINGS OF THE DEAR DESIRE

"My lord—I—" she, halting, began; "I—I—came back—" and she appealed to him silently for a word.

Then she forgot all she had planned to tell him; forgot to tell him of her pride, her years of doubting and persistent disbelief, when she had clutched at every evil rumor she ever heard of him to fortify her resistance. She forgot her dogged resolution to yield nothing to his force. All of these Julie forgot.

She stood before him with shining, misty eyes, a transfigured Julie, a woman of flesh and blood—warm, glowing, passionate flesh and blood. She had defied him when she was his captive; she was proud to obey him forever, now that she was free.

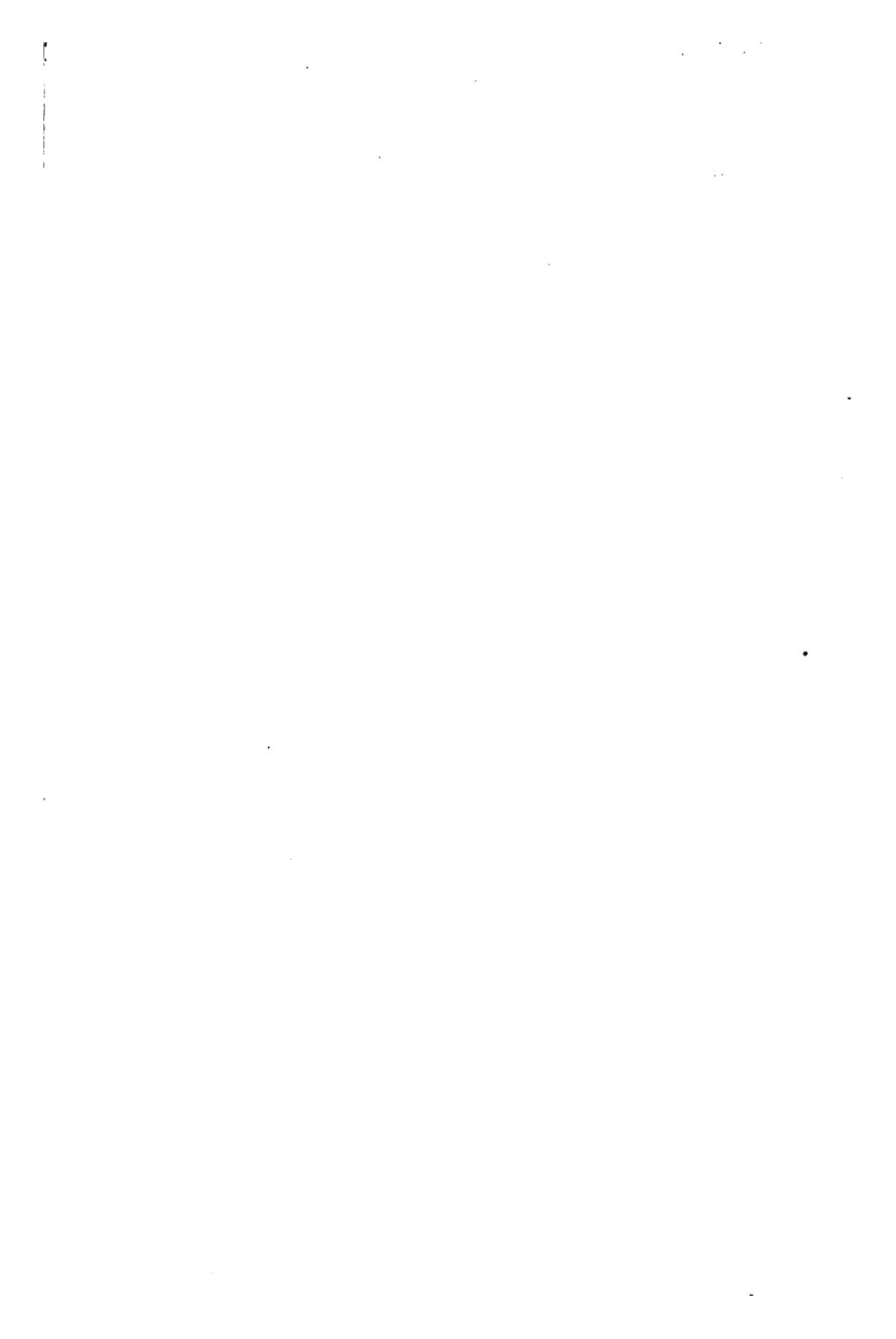
Her voice dropped lower and died away; her figure swayed gently towards him; her fingers groped their way to his, unconsciously as the ivy tendrils seek the tower.

And then the real Julie opened wide her heart, opened wide her arms, and, forgetting all else in the world, she walked firmly to the man and faltered out:

"Oh, César, César, it was very hard to—come back. I did not believe you would let me go."



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